

THE SERMON COACH:
HOW A COACHING APPROACH HELPS PREACHERS IMPROVE

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We stand on the shoulders of giants, and are heirs of those who have gone before. And there is nothing like research to remind one of that fact. The Bibliography at the back of this thesis project is testimony to the shoulders I stand on in the work I have done over the last four years.

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Accept, O Lord, our thanks and praise for all that you have
done for us. We thank you for the splendor of the whole
creation, for the beauty of this world, for the wonder of life,
and for the mystery of love.

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truth of his Word and the example of his life; for his steadfast
obedience, by which he overcame temptation; for his dying,
through which he overcame death; and for his rising to life
again, in which we are raised to the life of your kingdom.

Grant us the gift of your Spirit, that we may know him and
make him known; and through him, at all times and in all
places, may give thanks to you in all things. *Amen.*

Book of Common Prayer page 836

ABSTRACT

Most preachers need to improve. Some recognize that fact and are willing to invest time and money to do so. For those motivated preachers, however, the means of improvement are in large part inaccessible, or ineffective. This study develops an approach, rooted in the discipline of Christian Coaching, that is both effective and can easily be made available to help preachers improve. It demonstrates that in two ways. First, it roots the mind-set, skills, and techniques of coaching within the Biblical narrative, as well as contemporary theoretical work in behavior change, adult learning, and secular coaching. Second, it presents a research study conducted with five coaching clients, over a one-year period, documenting each person's path of improvement, and measuring the results. The coaching course developed in this study can be used to train other coaches to serve preachers who are motivated to improve.

CHAPTER ONE

THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

Identify the Problem

Most preachers need to improve their preaching. Some know that and are willing to invest time and money doing it. However, the practical means of improving are either not effective or not readily accessible. This project will demonstrate that performance coaching methodology is effective and can be made accessible. Chapter four offers a manual to guide coaches to help preachers improve.

That most preachers need to improve is obvious in my own career as a preacher. I've always considered myself a good preacher, but after I was the senior pastor of a congregation for about five years it became clear I was stuck in a rut. I had been preparing and presenting sermons in the same way, week-after-week for years with what I perceived as diminishing returns. Coming up with material for each week's sermon frequently caused anxiety. It often felt like I was grasping at straws on Thursday for something to say on Sunday. I turned to other preachers for insight and material, particularly Tim Keller, N.T. Wright, Bill Hybels, Barbara Brown Taylor, and John Ortberg. They helped, but I soon became prone to imitation and tempted to outright plagiarism. I also suffered the curse of comparison: "They are so good. I am so lame!" Seeing the impact of their preaching, in the form of large congregations, popular books, and global ministries and prominence, I became increasingly frustrated by the seeming lack of impact of my own preaching. And when I thought about the future, depending on the

work of others for the next 30 years of ministry, I was terrified to realize this model was unsustainable.

That is just one preacher's perspective. Randy Pelton, in a 1994 survey of seasoned preachers, found that significant proportions of preachers struggle with sermon development. Pelton discovered that 43% of preachers struggle with illustrations, 34% with developing sermon outlines, and 39% with making the sermon relevant. In my own survey research of my clergy colleagues in the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia,¹ I discovered that while nearly every respondent put a very high value on preaching in their ministry, and are satisfied with the outcomes of their preaching, thirty-one respondents expressed ambivalence about the effectiveness of their preparation process, and seventeen of those "strongly agreed" that they were "willing to invest time and money to improve" their preaching. That's one preacher in four who expressed strong motivation to work at improving.

For those preachers willing to work at improving, however, the practical means of improving their preaching are either ineffective, or inaccessible. A cursory survey of how a preacher might improve illustrates the point:

1. A preacher might listen to good sermons on CD or podcast, but that is more likely to result in mere imitation (or maybe plagiarism) rather than the transformation of their own preaching. It is easy for a preacher to become

¹ In October 2012, I distributed 86 surveys and received 72 responses from clergy colleagues in the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia. See Appendix A for the introductory letter, survey instrument and analysis of the results.

dependent on the material of others and allow their own creative well to run dry.

2. A preacher might read a book on preaching, but that educational activity doesn't often lead to practical and substantial change in how one prepares and delivers sermons. Most people lack the discipline or time needed to translate good ideas from a book into sustained action, which behavior change often requires.
3. A preacher might attend a preaching conference where they participate in practical learning experiences, but most participants will not follow through and incorporate what they learned.
4. A preacher might take a course in preaching at a local Bible college or seminary. Access to this option, however, is limited by location and geography, and besides, most courses are tailored to the needs of new preachers.
5. A preacher might matriculate in a degree program geared to preaching, like the D.Min. track in preaching at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary. However, such programs are few and far between, are costly in time and money, and might offer more than a preacher wants.

The most accessible learning experiences (books, conferences, CDs) suffer from a fatal flaw: low information-to-action ratio. The preacher who wants to improve can easily access lots of information about why and how to improve, but Alan Deutschman has demonstrated that more than mere information is needed to change people's

behavior. For instance, “Some 90% of heart-bypass patients can’t change their lifestyles even at the risk of dying. No wonder changing people’s behavior is the toughest challenge in business.”² Old habits die hard and Raymond Wlodkowski demonstrated why. Attitudes and behaviors are rooted in the networks of neurons in our brain. These physical synaptic structures take shape over time, through repetition and practice. Time, repetition and practice are the only way to alter them. Books, CDs, and seminars “don’t have the biological impact to cause the physical changes in a learner’s brain that need to occur for a real alteration in the learner’s attitude or belief.”³ Because of that, the pressures of life transform most of our good intentions into last year’s failed New Year’s resolutions. This reality led Christian Coach, Tony Stoltzfus to conclude, “Change is more a function of motivation than information.”⁴ We can see this in our own experience. How many people have been to a conference or seminar, listened to great speakers, taken copious notes, bought books and DVDs and returned home inspired to change? But once they get home and return to their normal routines and the pressures of daily life the inspiration and information they came home with evaporates like a puddle in the sun. The same results often follow reading a book or taking a course. The books and

² Alan Deutschman, “Making Change”, *Fast Company* 94 (May 2005): 54.

³ Raymond Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, 3rd ed (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 12.

⁴ Tony Stoltzfus, *Christian Leadership Coaching: Developing the Heart, Mindset, and Skills of a Coach* (Virginia Beach, VA: self-published, 2005), 16.

note books end up on the shelf and we rarely get around to applying what we have learned. Hall, Copper and McElveen observed:

Learning in classrooms and from books and from fill-in-the-blank studies tends to put a lot of information in our heads, but often very little of that learning trickles into the actual, lived lives of the learners. In fact, it's usually up to the learner to apply the information. Our experience is that few people who know how, or have the proper motivation to do so.⁵

Haddon Robinson shared an anecdote illustrating that more information about preaching can sometimes even get in the way of good preaching. There's a physician and a lawyer who regularly play golf together. Robinson noted:

They were evenly matched and enjoyed a keen sense of rivalry. Then one spring the lawyer's game improved so much that the doctor was losing regularly. The doctor's attempts to better his own game were unsuccessful, but then he came up with an idea. At a bookstore he bought three how-to-play-golf manuals and sent them to the lawyer for a birthday present. It wasn't long before they were evenly matched again.⁶

The advice of experts can actually have a deleterious effect on people trying to change.

In the case of the heart patients cited above, the doctor's approach of giving their patients facts and fear, has the effect of demoralizing their patients. "From the very start, every aspect of the healing process reinforces the belief that you're powerless and the doctors are all-powerful"⁷ The advice-giving expert ends up sapping a person's personal responsibility, breeding dependency, helplessness, and passivity. It generates

⁵ Hall, Copper and McElveen, *Faith Coaching* (Hickory, NC: Coach Approach Ministries, 2009), 40.

⁶ Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 52.

⁷ Deutschman, *Change or Die*, 32.

resistance “against the demeaning, condescending, and superior stances of those who assume the knowledge and authority to goad them.”⁸

Translating information into actual changed preaching, Sunday after Sunday, requires a radically different sort of learning process, one which results in shifts in attitudes, thinking, perceptions and behaviors which are gradual and cumulative over time. This process of change can be catalyzed by new information, but rarely can it be sustained by mere information. This thesis project will demonstrate that coaching is a very different sort of learning process. It is effective because coaching leverages a person’s motivation into a process of transforming habits and skills to achieve potential. Coaching is the bridge between information and action.

The Importance of Improved Preaching

Much has been written on the importance of preaching. The Holy Spirit uses preaching to shape, empower, and guide God’s people to do the work Christ has given us to do. When preaching is ineffective, the church is too. When preaching improves, so will the churches’ influence on the world. In short, improved preaching will have three important impacts:

1. Preachers will be more effective and satisfied in their ministry.
2. People in their congregations will be more likely learn, live and share the Gospel.

⁸ Deutschman, *Change or Die*, 153.

3. Congregations will be more effective in mission to make disciples of all nations.

This thesis will demonstrate that coaching makes measurable improvement in preaching and thus empowers the church to change the world.

The Proposed Solution

This thesis project assumes that many preachers would like to improve, but the means to do so are either inaccessible because of cost or distance, or are ineffective. The more readily-available resources are often ineffective because changing one's habits of sermon preparation and delivery only results from a sustained, incremental discipline of self-analysis, goal-setting, experimentation, and changed behavior. Few people are able to do that on their own. With a coach, however, they can. "Coaches specialized in working with people who feel stuck and want help getting out of their ruts."⁹

A Summary of the Coaching Approach

Tony Stoltzfus observed that, "In our generation, a seismic change is occurring in the way that leaders are trained and developed."¹⁰ Top-down systems and didactic ways of teaching are giving way to team-based models that empower more people to

⁹ Gary Collins, *Christian Coaching: Helping Others Turn Potential into Reality* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2009), 37.

¹⁰ Stoltzfus, *Christian Leadership Coaching*, vii.

learn using a wide array of educational experiences. Coaching is one such learning process. Gary Collins said, “Coaching is the art and practice of enabling individuals and groups to move from where they are to where they want to be. Coaching helps people expand their vision, build their confidence, unlock their potential, increase their skills, and take practical steps toward their goals.”¹¹

If learning is defined as a “change in a person resulting from meaningful interaction with his or her environment,”¹² then coaching facilitates that “meaningful interaction” not by giving advice or supplying more information, but by asking questions that help the person discover new perspectives, discern their own priorities and challenges, and then devise their own solutions. Stoltzfus said, “At its heart leadership coaching is helping people solve their own problems without telling them what to do.”¹³ It accomplishes this remarkable feat by “listening more than talking, asking more than telling, and reflecting more than commenting. Such coaching is not about giving advice, demonstrating techniques, solving problems, or offering constructive criticism.”¹⁴

But what is “coaching”? The name of this discipline is a metaphor that often produces puzzled responses. From early days of English usage, the word “coach” described a means of conveyance, a horse-drawn vehicle that would transport people

¹¹ Collins, *Christian Coaching*, 14.

¹² Sid Buzzell, “Learning: What It Is and Helping Others ‘DO’ It,” (lecture, GCTS, Hamilton, MA, June 12, 2012). Emphasis is in the original.

¹³ Stoltzfus, *Christian Leadership Coaching*, 1.

¹⁴ Bob and Megan Tschannen-Moran, *Evocative Coaching* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 5.

from where they are to where they wanted to go. The English term “coach” is derived from the Hungarian word *kocsi* meaning “carriage” that was named after the village where it was first made. As far as we know, the first time we learn of the word “coach” used in the realm of athletics was when it was used to describe the tutor who helped Cambridge University students with their rowing on the Cam River in the 1860s. The “coach” would aid athletes moving from one level of performance to another by helping them improve their skills, discipline, and teamwork. In the last decade or two, the term “coach” has been adopted by practitioners of a distinct discipline outside the world of athletics to describe leaders who help people in many different areas of life and work, to advance to new levels of performance.¹⁵ The discipline of coaching has evolved under the influence of many fields of study including adult education, psychology (sports, clinical, developmental, organizational, social and industrial), change management and personal development, and other organizational, or leadership theories and practices. Since the mid-1990s, coaching has taken shape as an independent discipline with the formation of professional associations such as the Association for Coaching, the International Coach Federation, and the European Coaching and Mentoring Council. These bodies have developed codes of ethics, training standards and criteria for holding their members accountable for the sake of protecting the interests of coaching clients. The International Coach Federation has defined coaching:

Coaching is partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential. Professional coaches provide an ongoing partnership designed to help clients

¹⁵ Collins, *Christian Coaching*, 12.

produce fulfilling results in their personal and professional lives. Coaches help people improve their performances and enhance the quality of their lives. Coaches are trained to listen, to observe and to customize their approach to individual client needs. They seek to elicit solutions and strategies from the client; they believe the client is naturally creative and resourceful. The coach's job is to provide support to enhance the skills, resources, and creativity that the client already has.¹⁶

Coaching is different from *mentoring*, in which a mentor imparts wisdom and opportunities to a junior.¹⁷ It is different from *counseling*, in which a counselor diagnoses problems and suggests solutions. It is different from *discipleship* in which a discipler communicates the basics of Christian living and helps keep a believer on track. It is different from *consulting* where an outside expert analyzes a situation and makes recommendations for its improvement. It is different from *managing* in which a manager makes sure people do what they know how to do. It is different from *training*, which is teaching people to do what they don't know how to do.

In contrast to these familiar approaches, *coaching* is about helping people solve their own problems, not by imparting to you what God has given me, but by drawing out of you what God has put in you. It is helping to identify the skills and capabilities that are within the person, and enabling the client to use them to the best of their ability.

¹⁶ *International Coach Federation* website, "Core Competencies," accessed March 10, 2017, <http://coachfederation.org/credential/landing.cfm?ItemNumber=2206>.

¹⁷ It should be noted that the concept of 'coaching' has advanced significantly since 1999 when Charles Boyd submitted a D.Min. thesis project under the title *Preachers Mentoring Preachers Through Distance Sermon Coaching*. He defined coaching as "a relational process in which the mentor, who knows how to do something very well, and how to show another how to do it, imparts those skills to a protégé who wants to learn them" p. 10. In this definition and throughout Boyd's thesis project "coaching" and "mentoring" were used interchangeably, using a meaning much closer to what in this present project is calls "mentoring."

“Coaching is a radical belief in people, practiced in a consistent, disciplined way in order to help others grow.”¹⁸ Hall, Copper and McElveen described how coaching puts that “belief in people” to work:

Coaching requires [the coach] to tap into the expertise of the other person. It’s the person being coached who has the expertise concerning what is important to her, what is not working for her, what God is saying to her, and where her faith needs to take her. The person being coached doesn’t necessarily have access to her own expertise, and this is where coaching comes in to help. As a coach you help others uncover and act on what they already know.¹⁹

In countless cases, well-meaning people try to “help” others, often by shielding them from the consequences of their actions, or performing tasks they can do themselves, or telling them what we think they should do. But the coach recognizes that “the first key to change isn’t offering protection or admonition. It’s about inspiring hope – the belief and expectation that they can and will change their lives. They need you to *believe* in them, which encourages their own belief.”²⁰ Such coaching takes many forms: life coaching, business coaching, project coaching, executive coaching, career coaching, financial coaching, personal coaching, health coaching, sports coaching, dating coaching, conflict coaching, marriage coaching, victim coaching, leadership coaching. Gary Collins has summarized the Christian coaching model using the following diagram. It lays out the process of transformation in which a coach asks powerful questions to help the client grow in awareness, clarify vision, develop strategy and action, and

¹⁸ Stoltzfus, *Christian Leadership Coaching*, 2.

¹⁹ Hall, Copper and McElveen, *Faith Coaching*, 24.

²⁰ Deutschman, *Change or Die*, 155. Emphasis in the original.

overcome obstacles moving forward to become the person Jesus Christ is calling them to be and to more effectively do the work Jesus is calling them to do.²¹

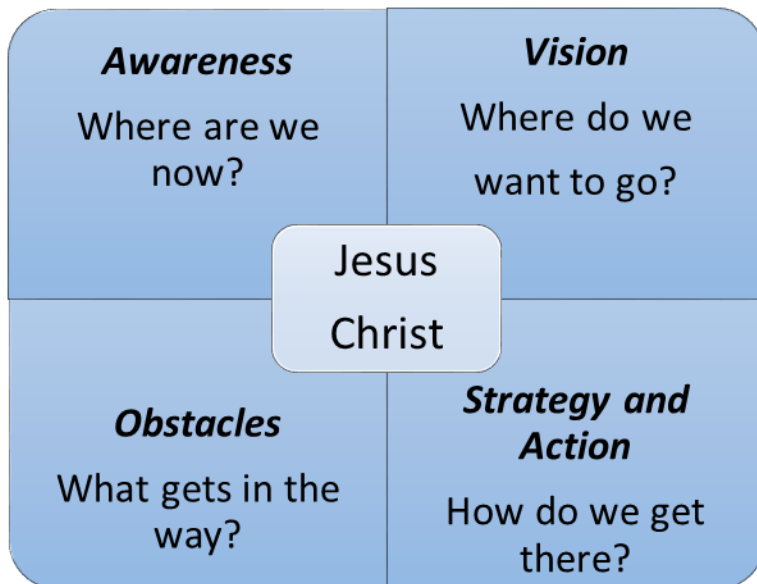


Figure 1. Gary Collins's Christian Coaching Model Summary

Coaches are “change experts” who help others take responsibility and act to maximize their potential. Coaches aren’t about telling and directing. Instead, the genius of the coach is to believe in people and what God is doing in their lives. So coaches ask instead of tell. They believe that each person is the expert of his/her own capabilities and context and can discern the way forward under God’s guidance. Coaches *raise awareness* by asking the client to evaluate “Where are we now?” Clients often realize that something is missing from their lives and their performance, but they often don’t know what it is. By asking powerful questions the coach helps the client

²¹ This process of reflection, decision and action to produce change works harmoniously with the “stages of change” described by Prochaska, Norcross and DiClemente, as we will see in chapter three.

gain awareness of their situation. Coaches *stimulate vision*. They ask us “where do you want to go?” Coaches invite us to discern the direction forward and set the agenda. They employ listening and asking skills to draw the answer out of the client, to craft it into specific goals. Coaches *elicit strategy and action*, asking “how do we get there?” Turning good ideas into specific plans is difficult. Translating them into action is even more challenging. The ask-don’t-tell approach helps maximize the client’s buy-in to the solution and gives them the chance to assume full responsibility for taking action to achieve those goals. Coaches *anticipate obstacles*. They ask, “What gets in the way?” Coaches then share the journey, supporting us as we take action to achieve our goals, growing into the people God made us to be. Each step of the way the coach uses communication skills, such as listening, questioning, and targeted restatements to help clients shift their perspectives and discover different solutions to achieve their goals. These skills are useful for clients in any field of endeavor including personal, professional, sport, social, family, political, spiritual activities. In short, “Coaching provides a support structure for change”²² that is tailored to each client’s priorities, motivation and context. That support structure provides the relational context in which a person can practice and repeat the new thought patterns, attitudes and behaviors over time so they have “biological impact” in the neural networks of the brain to become permanent change.²³ How will the coaching approach apply specifically to helping preachers improve?

²² Stoltzfus, *Christian Leadership Coaching*, 13.

²³ See discussion of Wlodkowski in chapter three.

A Summary of the Coaching Strategy for Helping Preachers Improve

Of the many types of coaching listed above, sermon coaching would be a subset of Executive Coaching, which The Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology defined: “Executive coaching is designed to help facilitate professional and personal development to the point of individual growth, improved performance and contentment. The coach attempts to stimulate the client's self-discovery by posing powerful questions [leading to] field experiments which are actions to try in the real world that may result in experiential learning and development of new approaches to situations.”²⁴ The specific goals contemplated in sermon coaching focus on helping preachers learn to think through and improve how they prepare and deliver sermons. The coaching process developed by Tony Stoltzfus in his book *Christian Leadership Coaching*, and other writings, provides a powerful way for a coach to help a preacher discover, and learn to utilize the thought process developed by Haddon Robinson in his book *Biblical Preaching*. Robinson’s Ten Stages of sermon preparation aren’t just one preaching *technique* among many. Instead, they describe the fundamental and inherent *thought process* one must undertake to develop consistently clear messages from scripture texts for contemporary audiences. In the Sermon Coaching Course developed in chapter four, Robinson’s stages become the questions a preacher must answer and the decisions a preacher must make to distill the

²⁴ “Coaching I,” a course at Atlantic International University, accessed March 31, 2017, <http://courses.aiu.edu/COACHING%20I/1/COACHING%20I%20-%20SESSION%201.pdf>

author's intent in a scripture text, and to translate that in a clear and relevant way for the preacher's congregation.

Robinson notes, however, the great challenge involved in teaching this thought process. "It is difficult to think. It is more difficult to think about thinking. It is most difficult to talk about thinking about thinking."²⁵ The coaching approach is an ideal way to achieve this most difficult learning objective. Coaching proceeds by inquiry. Probing questions stimulate reflection in the preacher, surfacing unexamined assumptions and thought processes. Follow-up questions then nudge the preacher to reflect on those thought processes, analyzing their relevance, deciding whether they produce the outcomes the preacher desires, and exploring alternative approaches. An inquiring approach lets the client see the preaching thought-process from a whole new perspective. In this way we see that "Coaching is helping people learn, instead of teaching them."²⁶ Malcolm Knowles states, "One of the most significant findings from adult learning research...is that when adults learn something naturally instead of 'being taught' they are highly self-directing." They feel ownership of the insights they themselves discover and are more motivated act on them. Knowles continues, "What adults learn on their own initiative they learn more keenly and permanently than what they learn by being 'taught'."²⁷ Instead of using a didactic approach – teaching,

²⁵ Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 51.

²⁶ Stoltzfus, *Christian Leadership Coaching*, 8.

²⁷ Malcolm Knowles, *Designs for Adult Learning*, American Society for Training & Development, 1995.

advising, critiquing and exhorting learners to “do it this way” – the sermon coach will help preachers (“clients”) discover this thought process for themselves by asking the questions raised in each of the Ten Stages.²⁸

The coach can use the Ten Stages, even with clients who are not yet familiar with them, at every step of the coaching process. The Ten Stages provide the implicit categories and metrics for the initial survey, allowing the coach to assist the client in evaluating their preaching and identifying specific areas where they are most motivated to improve. From these initial entry points, the coach can use the questions implicit and explicit within the Ten Stages to help the client identify their own thought process in preparing the message, and to stimulate reflection on what the scripture text is saying, how to communicate it to the audience. Through the coach’s questions the client will “discover” the Ten Stages for him or herself and begin to adopt the Ten Stages as their own thought-process. Through repetition the thought-process will become habitual. These outcomes are demonstrated in chapter five.

A Summary of the Coaching Program

This thesis project will develop a manual to guide coaches serving preachers who want to improve. It assumes the coaching relationship will unfold over the course of one year, during which time the client and coach will meet approximately twice a month for approximately one hour each session. The option is available to extend the coaching

²⁸ See Appendix B.

relationship beyond one year, but the ultimate goal of a coach is to empower the client to take responsibility for his or her own life, to become better leaders of their own lives and increasingly self-reliant for their own learning. The coach seeks to work himself out of a job so the client is able to make changes then move forward without further assistance. The coach imparts a process of reflection that leads to action so clients learn to coach themselves. A qualified coach will have the option of asking for appropriate financial compensation, much as a spiritual director, counselor, or therapist does.²⁹ Client and coach could arrange to meet face-to-face, if that's an option. In the likely event that face-to-face meetings are not convenient, client and coach may meet by phone or Skype. Coaching can be made easily accessible because it is not bound by location or distance.

The coaching relationship will begin with a process to help the client and coach get to know each other. This will accomplish several goals at the outset. 1) Create an atmosphere of trust and openness. When the coach asks and listens sympathetically, without judging or interrupting, this creates an atmosphere of safety for the client which, according to Maslow, is essential for the learning process.³⁰ 2) Build a relationship. To serve the preacher as *person* the coach builds a trusting relationship by sharing and exploring life stories, personal priorities, and Myers-Briggs personality

²⁹ Having been certified as a Christian Leadership Coach, and assuming achievement of a D.Min. degree, I plan to offer services as a "Sermon Coach" inviting preachers to invest one year and one thousand dollars (which is within the Continuing Education budget of most Episcopal congregations) to improve their preaching

³⁰ Knowles, *The Adult Learner*, 46-48.

types. 3) Tailor the coaches' approach to the client. Adult learning theory recognizes the importance of personal experience in how adults learn. Adults tend to define themselves in terms of the experiences they have had, making adult learning a highly individualized exercise. The coach's approach, therefore, must be tailored to each client. So the coach and client share life stories, exploring significant experiences that shaped them as a person and as a preacher, drawing out the meaning the client assigns to those experiences and, helping them define their values in terms of these experiences. 4) Orient to coaching. By asking and listening the coach begins to orient the client to, what might be for the client, a new way of learning and relating. Many clients might be accustomed to being dependent on educators, or counselors who tell them what to do, and may be unfamiliar with self-directed learning. These initial conversations will likely be their first experience in self-directed learning through relationship with others. 5) Establish a base line. The coach gains insight into how the client views preaching, what role it plays in their ministry context, what impact they see through their preaching, what sort impacts they would like to make. The coach explores how the client prepares sermons and asks what works and what does not work well for the client. Client and coach then focus on what the client's congregation thinks. With the coach's support, the client will then undertake an evaluation his or her own preaching:

1. Make a video recording of the sermon to get "the view from the pew."
2. Use a survey, which the coach will supply, to gather feedback from their congregation.
3. Analyze the results to identify specific areas for improvement.

4. Define goals for improvement that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timely.

This initial process will take 3-4 sessions (the first two months) and will establish the base-line for moving forward in the subsequent ten months, and for evaluating the process at the end of the course. During the remainder of the year the coach will use coaching techniques to help the client translate these goals into actions that will transform his or her preaching.

Organization of Chapters

I intend to approach *The Sermon Coach* in the following manner. This first chapter has sought to identify the problem, highlight its importance, and outline the solution. Chapter two will lay out a biblical and theological matrix from within which the mindset and skills of “Christian coaching” will emerge. This work of theology will trace the activity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in shaping the relationships, destiny and responsibility of human beings through the Biblical drama of creation, fall and redemption. We will identify the ways coaching emerges from and advances God’s work in, with and through his people.

In the third chapter, I will research literature relevant to how a coaching approach helps preachers improve. This will explore research into how people change to improve their performance by exploring behavior change theory, Appreciative Inquiry, adult learning theory, and secular coaching methodology. In examining these fields of inquiry

chapter three will seek validation, challenge and enrichment for the Sermon Coaching Course developed in chapter four.

The fourth chapter will draw on the research conducted over two years with five coaching clients to present a manual for coaches who want to help preachers improve. It will script in detail the Initial Stage sessions (first two months of the course) and Concluding Stage sessions (final month), complete with objectives and exercises for each session. Between those opening and closing phases, the coaching course is tailored to each individual clients' priorities and pace. It is therefore impossible to prescribe objectives and exercises. For that main phase of the coaching course I will, instead, present a verbatim account of my sessions with one client to give a flavor of how coaching works in practice, viewed through the experience of one coaching relationship. In each session general principles about coaching are deduced from their use in practice, to aid other coaches in applying them to their own clients. This chapter will serve as the start-up manual for the author's own work as "The Sermon Coach", as well as a way of equipping others who might like to undertake this strategic ministry in the future.

The fifth and final chapter will test the validity of using a coaching approach to help preachers improve. It will evaluate the program's effectiveness by gathering data from both the preachers and their hearers to measure the degree to which preaching improved. *To gather client evaluation*, I will rely on semi-structured exit interviews with *three* test-clients to gather qualitative input exploring how each preacher evaluated their experience of being coached, and the effectiveness of the program in improving

the client's preaching. I will ask: What did you learn? Where did you experience the most change? What did you find most beneficial in the coach's style? What was the least helpful? I'll ask questions to gauge the client's learning of the Ten Stages. I'll want to explore the areas where the client would like to invest in future improvements. *To gather congregational evaluation*, I will support the preacher in conducting congregational surveys using the instrument in Appendix A, which will be adapted to each context. Administered at the beginning and end of the coaching period, this survey will provide a clear metric of improvement.

Chapter Summary

There is hope for preachers who want to improve. Where reading and seminars have failed to produce change, where academic courses and degree programs are out of practical reach, coaching offers the effective and accessible means of helping preachers improve. This thesis project will demonstrate how the coaching approach pioneered by Tony Stoltzfus can help preachers utilize the sermon preparation approach pioneered by Haddon Robinson. I will demonstrate a Biblical basis for the coaching approach, and the theoretical basis for it in adult learning and behavior change theory, as well as an influential secular coaching methodology. From this material, I will develop a manual to guide coaches who want to help preachers improve.

CHAPTER TWO

THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The word “coach” is not found in the Bible, nor is “coaching,” as a discipline, explicit in the biblical narrative, but the principles and techniques of coaching are readily discernible as one studies Holy Scripture. This chapter will survey the sweep of the Bible’s narrative and describe how Christian coaching fits within it. I will draw out principles relevant to the coaching discipline, and develop a comprehensive theological vision of how coaching helps people to live more fully in relationship, to fulfill their destiny, and to take responsibility as stewards of their lives within God’s creation.

The Bible opens with the account of creation and ends with a vision of the creation made new. It begins with the image of a garden and closes with the picture of a city, with the ancient garden at its center. These are “the bookends of biblical theology.” Spanning the ages between them is the drama of man’s creation, fall and redemption, in which the triune God works to fulfill his loving purposes for the world. This narrative is the foundation for the mindset and skills of Christian coaching. From it coaches gain the vision, the values, and even the techniques to help people find and fulfill their unique roles as creatures made in God’s image. *The Book of Common Prayer*, in Eucharist Prayer D, tells the great biblical story in a compact and comprehensive way. In that prayer,

We acclaim you, holy Lord, glorious in power. Your mighty works reveal your wisdom and love. You formed us in your own image, giving the whole world into our care, so that, in obedience to you, our Creator, we might rule and serve all your creatures. When our disobedience took us far from you, you did not abandon us to the power of death. In your mercy

you came to our help, so that in seeking you we might find you. Again and again you called us into covenant with you, and through the prophets you taught us to hope for salvation.

Father, you loved the world so much that in the fullness of time you sent your only Son to be our Savior. Incarnate by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, he lived as one of us, yet without sin. To the poor he proclaimed the good news of salvation; to prisoners, freedom; to the sorrowful, joy. To fulfill your purpose he gave himself up to death; and, rising from the grave, destroyed death, and made the whole creation new.

And, that we might live no longer for ourselves, but for him who died and rose for us, he sent the Holy Spirit, his own first gift for those who believe, to complete his work in the world, and to bring to fulfillment the sanctification of all.¹

This summary of the Bible's big story will serve as the outline for chapter two. It divides neatly into three paragraphs, each featuring the work of a member of the Trinity in the creation, fall and redemption of human beings. Each paragraph introduces particular themes vital for our understanding of coaching.

God in Creation, Fall, and the Beginning of Redemption

The prayer begins where the Bible does, "in the beginning" with God's "mighty works" in creation, and describes human beings in three basic aspects of their nature. God made human beings "in your own image" for *relationship*, reflecting the divine community of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God gave human beings a *destiny*, to rule and serve all creatures. And within that calling God granted human beings *responsibility* to

¹ *Episcopal Book of Common Prayer* (New York, NY: Seabury Press, n.d.), 372.

choose how to fulfill their destiny. These three aspects of human nature have been noted by others, for example Philip Hughes described them using synonymous terminology:

[Man's] formation in the divine image capacitated him to enjoy personal *communion* with his Maker and to fulfill that distinctive *function* for which he was uniquely fitted of exercising dominion, under God over the rest of the created order. His power was matched by his *responsibility*. His self-fulfillment and the freedom of his being belong inseparably to the daily conduct of his life in harmony with the purpose for which he was created.²

Relationship, destiny, and responsibility are critical categories for Christian coaching. Each section of this chapter will follow these key themes, exploring the part they play in the Bible's narrative and how they are reflected in the discipline of Christian coaching.

Relationship

Creation: God Made Humans for Relationships

Prayer D intones, "You formed us in your own image...." Christians know the God they meet in Holy Scripture as a Trinity, one God in a community of three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. C.S. Lewis described it beautifully: "In Christianity God is not an impersonal or static thing. He's not even just one person but a dynamic pulsating activity, a life, a drama, a kind of dance."³ Alvin Plantinga described that dance: "The persons within God exalt, commune with and defer to one another. Each harbors the

² Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The True Image: The Origin and Destiny of Man in Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 114. Emphasis added.

³ Tim Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 2009), 213 ff.

others at the center of his being. In constant movements of overture and acceptance each envelops and encircles the others. God's interior life therefore flows with self-giving love for others."⁴ Each is entirely "with" and "for" the other. That dance of love first flowed forth in the act of creation making realms and the creatures that inhabit them. God initiated the work, and the Word of God and Spirit of God implemented it. But in Genesis 1:26 God's focus changed, and so did the author's use of divine pronouns. What had, to this point, been a sovereign creative command external to the person of God, operating outward upon the things being created, now became a discussion leading to consensus and a shared decision. The author introduced plural pronouns into the Creator God: "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness."⁵ In Genesis 1:27 the narrator elaborated, reverting to the singular pronoun: "God created mankind in his own image," but described "man" as plural persons: "male and female he created them." The image of the Triune God takes shape in human life as a relationship between persons. "Thus constituted a personal being whose personhood is rooted in the reality of his I-Thou relationship with his Creator, man has also a person-to-person relationship with his fellowmen who share in his constitution in the image of God."⁶ The dance of the divine persons is intended to animate relationships, within which God

⁴ Keller, *Reason for God*, 213.

⁵ Genesis 1:26. All Scripture citations are New International Version (NIV), unless otherwise noted.

⁶ Hughes, *True Image*, 52. Genesis 2 picked up on the theme, giving the reader a closer, more intimate view that fills in that picture. In Genesis 1, the Divine Plural's "image and likeness" in man becomes, in Genesis 2, a community of the man and "a helper fit for him" (Gen 2:18) and "the two become one flesh." The divine image is found in the paired polarity of a man and woman made one in marriage.

made humans to experience intimacy and dialogue, to form consensus and take concerted action like that shared within the divine community. This vision of God and man has enormous implications for human life. C.S. Lewis said, “This matters more than anything else in the world, for the whole dance or drama or pattern of this three-personal life is to be played out in each one of us. They are the great fountain of energy and beauty spurting up at the very center of reality and there is no other way to find the happiness for which we have been made.”⁷

Fall: Community Became Autonomy

“When our disobedience took us far from you,” joyful community succumbed to the assertion of personal autonomy. Genesis 3 narrated the fall of humanity when the serpent struck at Adam and Eve’s relationship with God. He undermined their trust in God’s goodness. With mistrust came selfishness and fear. This “rebellion is an act of willful isolation and individualism...an act of mutinous self-assertion by which [Adam] vainly imagines he can establish himself as the autonomous source and center of his personhood.”⁸ Instead of continuing to participate in the divine dance, Adam and Eve

⁷ Keller, *Reason for God*, 213.

⁸ Hughes, *True Image*, 53.

fled the presence of God.⁹ As a result of their alienation from God, humans would now know near-perpetual strife with one another.¹⁰

Redemption Begun: Relationships Restored

In the face of the profoundly negative realities of the Fall, God took profoundly positive, affirming action: “In your mercy you came to our help.” Even as he expelled them from the garden, God clothed Adam and Eve. Even as he described the curse under which they would live, he promised salvation and restoration. Since that time, human beings are “seeking” creatures, following a deep longing, the motivating force that drives all our efforts and ambition and achievement. St. Augustine famously prayed, “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”¹¹ At its core, human motivation is a longing for love and purpose, which can only be ultimately satisfied by intimacy with God. Fallen people, however, follow this longing into idolatry, seeking all sorts of God-substitutes. But God gave grace to humanity, like signposts along their path pointing the way back toward intimacy with their Maker. God has been working in the world since the fall, mysteriously drawing human beings back to relationship with him, helping people to choose the right path in

⁹ Genesis 3:8-10.

¹⁰ Genesis 3:12-13 The fall set in motion inter-personal alienation that destroyed people’s relationships with each other. When confronted by God, Adam broke faith and blamed Eve. Eve passed blame to the serpent. In the narrative’s next episode, Cain, when his sacrifice was found lacking next to Abel’s, murdered him rather than endure the contrast. Human strife with one another outwardly expresses the inner conflict of the divided self, which flows from fundamental alienation from God.

¹¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.1.

pursuit of their restless heart's desire, "so that in seeking you we might find you," as Prayer D expresses.

In time, God focused his work on a particular people, Israel, shaping that relationship in the covenants he established with them, beginning with Abraham. Significant steps toward a restored relationship were embodied in the Law and manifested in the Tabernacle and Temple of Israel. Here God dwelt, once more, with his people. Though Adam and Eve were cast from the presence of God in the Garden, the Tabernacle and Temple became the "place of meeting" where humans could once again approach the creator God and move a bit closer to the dance of the divine life of God. This relationship between God and Israel was a symbol of hope, through the promise to Abraham, that *all the nations* of the earth would be reconciled to God and one another.¹² Through the people of Israel God spoke to the world: "again and again you called us into covenant with you and through the prophets you taught us to hope for salvation." Israel was to demonstrate restored relationship with God for all the world to see. Instead of fallen self-centeredness, people were commanded to "love God", "love your neighbor as yourself"¹³ and even to "love the stranger."¹⁴

¹² Genesis 12:1-3.

¹³ Leviticus 19:18.

¹⁴ Deuteronomy 10:19.

How Coaching Fits: The Discipline of Being ‘With’ and ‘For’ Others

Christian coaching emerges from the vision above by offering a disciplined way of being “with” and “for” others. God made human beings for relationships modeled on the relations within the triune life of God. This vision enables Christian coaches to simultaneously maintain a profound appreciation for the individual and a profound embrace of community.¹⁵ The coach honors, in very practical ways, each person’s unique identity, personality, experiences, perspective and priorities, but not in a way that asserts human autonomy as the ultimate value. Each person is inherently interdependent with God, other people and the world God has made. The Christian coach works to raise awareness of the essential nature of these relationships. Stoltzfus argued:

We were never meant to live the Christian life alone. Christianity is an interdependent, community-oriented faith. And yet, when we set out to improve our prayer life, or deal with our anger problem, or increase our income or become a better father; most of the time we work on it completely alone. Coaching puts change back into the context of a learning community, where God always intended for it to be. You cannot live the life you were born to live without relationships. Fulfilling your destiny is only possible in community.¹⁶

The primary role of the coach is to come alongside the client, to be ‘with’ that person as “a true friend and a close confidant”¹⁷ in the journey of discernment, decision, action and transformation. Christian coaching is inherently and deeply relational, rooted

¹⁵ This balance is something unique that Christian coaching offers the wider coaching movement, which tends to err toward individualism in its intense focus on individual desires and goals.

¹⁶ Tony Stoltzfus, *Christian Leadership Coaching: Developing the Heart, Mindset, and Skills of a Coach* (Virginia Beach, VA: self-published, 2005), 29.

¹⁷ Stoltzfus, *Christian Leadership Coaching*, 6.

entirely in dialogue. Focused on the well-being of the client, the Christian coach is patient and persistent in building trust and intimacy as the environment for articulating goals and taking action and sharing the journey of transformation.

Christian coaching also offers a disciplined approach to being “for” others. In the face of human failure God took an affirming stance. “Again and again” he called us back into relationship with him. God reveals himself as being profoundly “for” humanity. The Christian coach is committed to following God’s example. Stoltzfus said, “Powerful coaching comes from studying, internalizing and imitating the Father’s heart toward us.”¹⁸ So the Christian coach adopts “the Father’s heart” as the basic approach to all relationships, in persistent pursuit of the client’s ultimate well-being. The coach assumes that the longing deep in a person’s heart is, at base, a longing for intimacy with God. In contrast to much of secular coaching, the Christian coach is not values-neutral, assuming that all goals a person might choose are equally valid, or worthy of pursuit. The Christian coach asks questions that surface a person’s experiences, values and goals, with the ultimate objective of helping the client move from self-centeredness to other-centeredness, free to live more harmoniously “with” and “for” God and others. Christian coaches are trained to self-consciously imitate God’s positive, hopeful approach to flawed people and their failures. Tony Stoltzfus said, “Expressing acceptance and belief in a person often brings about faster growth than pointing out

¹⁸ Stoltzfus, *Leadership Coaching*, 48.

what is wrong.”¹⁹ Consistently being “for” others helps establish the highly supportive relational environment where people can change.²⁰

Christian coaching is “for” others by believing in people’s “self-efficacy,” which Tschannen-Moran defined as, “The capability to initiate or sustain desired performance improvements.”²¹ The coach assumes that, by God’s grace, a person can discern and achieve their destiny. No one else is more responsible or better equipped for figuring out how to do that than the person himself. The Christian coach looks to each person as the expert on their own life and is thus responsible for choosing the path forward in relationship with God and other people. When this value of believing in people is practiced well, it has a powerful impact. Stoltzfus said, “Nothing is more empowering. Nothing causes you to reach higher and accomplish more than having companionship, someone in our life who loves us for who we are and believes unconditionally in what we can become.”²²

According to Stoltzfus, being “for” the client takes shape in three important disciplines: “listening, asking questions, and keeping responsibility with the client.”²³ By listening well the coach is saying “I am here for you. You are important. I care about

¹⁹ Stoltzfus, *Leadership Coaching*, 144.

²⁰ Prochaska, Norcross and DiClemente argue that such “helping relationships” are of “primary value” in the process of change and working helping techniques into each stage of change; *Changing for Good*, 12, 94, 141, 161, 195, 216, 236. Most of their techniques are coaching-compatible.

²¹ Bob and Megan Tschannen-Moran, *Evocative Coaching* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 16.

²² Stoltzfus, *Leadership Coaching*, 52.

²³ Stoltzfus, *Leadership Coaching*, 55.

you.” By asking good questions, the coach is communicating the message, “You have the capacity to think and act. Your insights and values are important. You are responsible for the outcomes, not me.” Taken together, the skills of listening and asking powerfully communicate the message: “I am ‘for’ you,”²⁴ in a way that keep the responsibility with the client, not dependent on the coach.

God made us for relationship with God and one another, modeled on the love shared within the divine community. But when the Fall turned us away toward autonomy and alienation, God in his mercy set about to restore human beings to right relationships. God’s stance of love toward his people inspires the discipline of Christian coaching. The result is a practical approach to being “with” and “for” others in ways that can change their lives.

Destiny

In Creation, God Gave Us a Job to Do

In creation, God made human beings for stewardship over all that God created, each individual cooperating with others to fulfill their destiny. Eucharistic Prayer D says, “You formed us in your own image, giving the whole world into our care, so that,

²⁴ As a “relational process, coaching is very relevant in our time. More and more Americans are starved for real relationships. In 2006, the American Sociological Review published a study, “Social Isolation in America.” It reported a “remarkable drop” in the size of a person’s core network of confidants. As of 2004, the average American had just two close friends, compared to three in 1985. Those reporting no close friends jumped from 10 percent to 25 percent. The share of Americans reporting a healthy circle of four or five friends plunged from 33 percent to just over 15 percent. Americans have the highest percentage of one-person households in the world. For the purposes of this thesis – coaching preachers - preachers are often quite isolated. Sermon coaching offers transformative community for preachers, to be “with” each other in ways not limited by distance.

in obedience to you, our Creator, we might rule and serve all your creatures.” Genesis 1 described that destiny: “God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’”²⁵ In Genesis 2 that calling is further defined as “work the ground and take care of it,” and name the creatures.²⁶ “God’s creation provides the environment and the material for man’s creativity.”²⁷ Into this good creation God sent human beings with the destiny of “developing the creation through the work of his image-bearing human creatures.”²⁸ Humanity’s purpose was “to reflect God’s wise, fruitful ordering into creation, and to reflect creation’s praise back to the creator. Humans are the creatures through whom God had intended to tend his world, to make the garden fruitful, to name the animals, to reflect his glory into the whole creation.”²⁹

Humans were made to explore, describe, extract, fabricate, cultivate, organize, enhance, and use the vast potential latent in God’s world. This destiny was inherently *relational* and cooperative. Adam and Eve were to “be fruitful and multiply,” producing progeny who would creatively combine their unique capabilities to “fill the earth and

²⁵ Genesis 1:28.

²⁶ Genesis 2:15, 2:19-20, respectively.

²⁷ Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The True Image: The Origin and Destiny of Man in Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 64. Genesis 2:10-14 named geographical regions surrounding the garden into which humans were to spread, some of the natural resources found there, and the products to be derived through human labor.

²⁸ N.T. Wright, *Paul* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2009), 102.

²⁹ Wright, *Paul*, 486.

subdue it.” God modeled that in the dialogue of creation, showing humans how to collaborate in dialogue with each other and with God. But that dominion was also an inherently *individual* enterprise, with each person taking responsibility to discern and decide how to contribute to the work of the whole. Every person has a unique role to play and every conceivable form of labor and service is included in the effort.

The creation event was just one of “the bookends of biblical theology.” At the other end of the story the Bible gives a glimpse of the outcome. The Bible begins with the image of the primordial garden and closes with the picture of a magnificent city, with the ancient garden at its center.³⁰ Spanning the distance between them is the drama of man’s redeemed labor, co-laboring³¹ with the triune God, praying “thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” The Garden-City at the end of the Bible is, we may surmise, the product of the collaboration of humans together with God.³² All the latent potential of the earth, transformed through human effort and craftsmanship into things that are beautiful and useful, will be built to the glory of God and the good of others. Every decision, every bit of work undertaken, every hour of labor is intended to be part of humanity’s role in fulfilling this destiny.

³⁰ Revelation 22:1-2.

³¹ In 1 Corinthians 3:5-16, Saint Paul sees himself as a co-laborer with God and others in the great task of building God’s temple in this world, working with metaphorical precious metals and stones.

³² In Revelation, we find the gold from the land of Havilah in Genesis (2:10-14) is mined, refined and crafted into paving in the streets of the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:21). The onyx and other jewels in that land were similarly fashioned into foundations of the city (Rev 21:19-20). The pearls that compose the gates were extracted from oysters over which humans were given dominion.

Fall: Human Destiny Became Idolatry and Death

Genesis 3 tells the story of how humans were sidetracked from their destiny by idolatry leading to dehumanization and death. God made human beings to reflect his glory in the creation, to “rule and serve” all God’s creatures, but the serpent tempted Adam and Eve to pursue a different destiny: “You shall be as God.” But in the ultimate irony, these would-be-gods became enslaved to the very creatures they were made to rule. The result was curse, abuse and chaos which radically impaired human ability to fulfill their destiny, “By opening his heart to sin man not only sought willfully to suppress the image in which he was made and to separate himself from his Creator, but also, because of his position at the head of the created order, he dragged down the rest of creation with himself into depravity and frustration.”³³ Human labor came under curse, making the tasks by which people fulfill their destiny much more difficult.³⁴ Rather than working to build God’s kingdom, fallen people built their own kingdoms, typified by the Tower of Babel. Instead of working to build the New Jerusalem, they became sidetracked, constructing brutal empires³⁵ to subjugate each other and the earth. As a result, humans have often found themselves stuck in futility and despair.

³³ Hughes, *True Image*, 73.

³⁴ Genesis 3:16-19.

³⁵ Daniel chapters 2 and 7.

Redemption Begun, Israel Inherits the Land

Redemption began with the call of Abraham in Genesis 12:1-4. With the Tower of Babel in the backdrop, God's call to Abram revealed God's promise to reverse the scattering of humanity and restore the world. This promise came to life in the growth of the tribes of Israel and their formation into a nation settled in the land of promise. Even as the abundant life promised to Israel in the land³⁶ recalled the abundance enjoyed by Adam and Eve in the Garden, it also looked forward to a future hope. "The land was a sign of a far greater promise, that Abraham's family would inherit the whole world, the earth, the cosmos."³⁷ The Psalms portrayed it in many ways,³⁸ as did Isaiah.³⁹ As Prayer D puts it, "Through the prophets you taught us to hope for salvation." This salvation would encompass the whole earth, as pictured in the new heavens and new earth, what Jesus called "the renewal of all things."⁴⁰

³⁶ Leviticus 26:1-13, Deuteronomy 28:1-14.

³⁷ Wright, *Paul*, 366.

³⁸ Psalm 2:8f.; 22:27; 72:8-11; 89:25; 105:44; and 111:6.

³⁹ Isaiah gave glimpses of God's promise to draw all nations to Zion (2:2), where the gentiles will seek him (11:10). Egypt and Syria will be blessed with Israel (19:24-25), and songs of worship will come from the coastlands (24:15-16). When God removes the veil of darkness covering the peoples (25:7), the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness (26:9). The Servant will be a light to the nations bringing justice and praise to the ends of the earth (42:13), when every knee bows and every tongue confess (45:22-23), the nations will help restore Israel and build a new Jerusalem (60: 3, 5, 10, 12; 61:5, 11; 62: 2, 10). Isaiah also showed the world being made new using the language of Eden's restoration in which the wilderness is turned to a fruitful field (32:15, cf. 29:17), the barren mountains flow with streams of water (30:25), and the desert blossoms and waters burst forth in the wilderness (35:1, 2, 6, 7; 41:18-19; 44:3-4) when "he will make the desert like the garden of Eden" (51:3).

⁴⁰ Matthew 19:28 (NIV), cf. Daniel 7:13-14.

How Coaching Fits: A Way of Discerning One's Destiny and Making Plans to Fulfill It

The Christian coach sees people in context of God's restoration of human destiny and applies it in practical ways. "Coaches care genuinely and work tirelessly to germinate and grow human potential. We do this because we believe deeply that God has given people potential to release."⁴¹ The Coach is able to listen confidently, without judgment, to people who have been side-tracked by idolatry and are stuck in the fallen state of the world. The coach is able to hear where the person is, in the difficult present, and to introduce a hopeful perspective by asking the person to picture their life in the "ideal future." The coach knows that human beings have inborn ambitions and dreams to inherit the earth, and to work together to fulfill their dreams. But, because of the fall, they are often *sidetracked* by idolatry from their God-given destiny, and are frequently *stuck* in failure and discouragement. Coaching asks sidetracked and stuck people to see themselves within the biblical narrative, to see their lives from God's perspective and to imagine a better future. The Christian coach can then invite the person to turn that dream into a goal. By providing a structured approach to elucidating his goals, the coach helps the client realize that his destiny is within reach. The coach then shares the journey "with" the client, providing support and encouragement to make the dream a reality. Fueled by hope and companionship, Christian coaching helps a person who is stuck to free herself and take concrete action to fulfill her destiny.

⁴¹ Hall, Copper and McElveen, *Faith Coaching*, 195.

Responsibility

Creation: God Gave Us a Choice in How to Fulfill Our Destiny

God gave human beings responsibility over how to fulfill their destiny. Reading the creation narrative one is struck by the latitude God gave Adam and Eve. Their mandate was vast in scope, but scant in detail. God did not give them an instruction manual; rather his directions were few and simple. He told them in the very broadest terms *what* he wanted them to do, but said next to nothing about *how* to do it. God left the whole cosmos open before Adam and Eve and their progeny and said, in essence, “Let’s figure it out.”⁴² In God’s image, humans were given the gift of self-efficacy. God equipped humans for this responsibility by giving capacity to envision the future, to examine options and make decisions, to make plans and work toward goals, to adjust course and accept consequences. “We are given building blocks to see what can be done with them, using for the task all of our intelligence, creativity, and love. Our critical faculties are required; we must use them the best way we can constructively and with love.”⁴³ Man was made free and responsible to work in partnership with the Creator to fulfill his destiny.

⁴² General George Patton described this approach, “Never tell people *how* to do things. Tell them *what* to do and they will surprise you with their ingenuity.”

⁴³ Suzanne Farnham, Joseph P. Gill, R. Taylor McLean, and Susan M. Ward, *Listening Hearts: Discerning Call in Community*, rev. (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1991), 14.

Fall: Human Responsibility Becomes Denial and Excuses

In the Fall, human responsibility became denial and excuses. In the words of Philip Hughes, “sin was introduced into the Edenic scene through the only door that could be opened to it, namely, the will of man who alone of this world’s creatures is a morally responsible person.”⁴⁴ The effects are well known. Instead of embracing their responsibility, people became strangers to the truth, hiding from God, and shifting blame to others. Wright concluded, “...so far from being set in authority over the world,” human beings now “have no control over themselves.”⁴⁵ In this situation people know they need to change, because their nature cries out to fulfill their destiny, but instead they are stuck in habitual patterns of destructive behavior. Faced with repeated failure they feel powerless and their situation appears hopeless.

Redemption Begun: Seek and Find Wisdom

When humanity was helpless and hopeless in this bondage of their will, God gave grace to help people seek and find wisdom. Prayer D praises God that “In your mercy you came to our help, so that in seeking you we might find you....” God’s “mercy” and “help” are what theologians have called, “common grace” and “prevenient grace.” According to Louis Berkhof, God’s common grace is at work in the world “to check the course of evil, to

⁴⁴ Hughes, *True Image*, 73. The catechism of the *Book of Common Prayer* says, “From the beginning human beings have misused their freedom and made wrong choices;” *Book of Common Prayer*, 845.

⁴⁵ Wright, *Paul*, 493.

promote the development of the natural powers of man, to keep alive within the hearts of men a desire for civil righteousness, for external morality and good order in society, and to shower untold blessings upon mankind in general.”⁴⁶ It “distributes in varying degrees gifts and talents among men, promotes the development of science and art.”⁴⁷ In addition to common grace protecting society, theologians also refer to prevenient grace, which draws individuals into relationship with God, *preceding* their conversion, offsetting the effects of the fall, and restoring human responsibility to choose.⁴⁸ God thus maintains the fallen creation, restrains sin, and operates upon human consciences enabling people’s ability to grope their way toward relationship with him.

God’s grace is drawing people to choose either wisdom, leading to life, or foolishness leading to death.⁴⁹ Wisdom and Folly were each pictured as a woman beckoning the impressionable to choose her as companion. The message of Proverbs can be summarized: “Choose wisdom. Here’s why.” Gerhard Von Rad wrote that, “wisdom means becoming competent with regard to the realities of life: how things really happen, how things really are, and what to do about it.”⁵⁰ Proverbs said

⁴⁶ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1939), 438.

⁴⁷ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 443.

⁴⁸ The Calvinist and Wesleyan traditions differ on the extent and efficacy of prevenient grace. That debate is beyond the scope of this chapter. For our purposes we will settle for the general formulation of Prayer D.

⁴⁹ Exodus 24:7 and Joshua 24:14-15.

⁵⁰ Gerhard Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1972).

that wisdom begins with “the fear of the Lord,”⁵¹ because God is the most fundamental reality. In practical terms “fear” is reverent awe for WHO God is, attentiveness to WHAT God is doing, and resonance with HOW God is doing it. Von Rad summarized it simply as “knowledge” of God. The result is growing knowledge of self. Proverbs says, “Trust in the Lord...Don’t be wise in your own eyes.”⁵² The person who is becoming wise is learning to approach God, life and other people with humility. Fallen people are being restored “to their dignity, their ‘glory’, their place in glad, free obedience to [God] and in wise, stewardly authority over the world.”⁵³

How Coaching Fits: Inquiring and Planning

Knowing that God’s common and prevenient grace is quietly drawing people closer to himself, the Christian coach encourages the client to take responsibility by seeking wisdom in every situation. The book of Proverbs makes a promise relevant to the discipline of Christian coaching: “Blessed are those who find wisdom, those who gain understanding.”⁵⁴ To aid the client in getting understanding, the coach helps him get in touch with reality. That is the first step in Collins’ coaching model, illustrated in the diagram below. Coach and client gain awareness of reality by exploring “where are we now.”

⁵¹ Proverbs 1:7.

⁵² Proverbs 3:5, 7.

⁵³ Wright, *Paul*, 493.

⁵⁴ Proverbs 3:13.

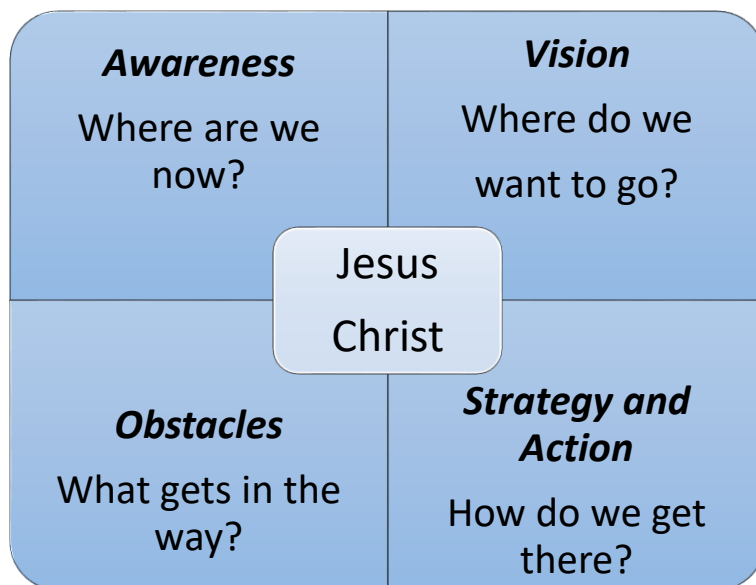


Figure 2. Gary Collins's Christian Coaching Model Summary

A key method is to ask questions that stimulate awareness and insight of what God may be doing in any situation.⁵⁵ Gerhard von Rad said, "Effective knowledge of God is the only thing that puts a man into a right relationship with the objects of his perception, that enables him to ask questions more pertinently, to take stock of relationships more effectively and generally to have a better awareness of circumstances."⁵⁶

An Inquiring Approach

⁵⁵ In the language of psychology, this is called "consciousness-raising," the first change process in Prochaska, Norcross and DiClemente's system. In Christian coaching parlance this is often called, "learning from life."

⁵⁶ Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 67-68.

God invites people to seek understanding and provides the means to do it. To gain wisdom one must take an inquiring approach, working to discover the realities of the world and other people. Proverbs 25:2 declares “The glory of God is to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search them out.” Some of the deepest mysteries we seek to understand are within other people. “The purposes of a person's heart are deep waters, but one who has insight draws them out.”⁵⁷ This is wisdom in relationships. God made all this to be explored and humanity’s highest calling – the work of kings! – is to “search them out.” God gave the tools to do it: “Ears that hear and eyes that see-- the LORD has made them both.”⁵⁸ These are organs of inquiry. The discipline of listening is at the heart of an inquiring approach. In contrast, “Fools find no pleasure in understanding but delight in airing their own opinions.”⁵⁹ A fool prefers telling rather than asking. Proverbs 18:13 drives home the point: “To answer before listening-- that is folly and shame.”⁶⁰ An inquiring approach enables people to become wise, to deepen relationships, to take increasing responsibility for their lives, and make the right choices to fulfill their destiny.

A Prudent Path

⁵⁷ Proverbs 20:5.

⁵⁸ Proverbs 20:12. See also Proverbs 18:15: “The ear of the wise seeks knowledge.”

⁵⁹ Proverbs 18:2.

⁶⁰ Notice that God took an inquiring approach with Adam and Eve (Gen 3:8-13) and Cain (Gen 4:6-10). Though knowing the answers, God pursued them with probing, powerful questions to draw forth what’s inside. God models how we, in his image, pursue understanding of God, others, and the world around us.

Gary Collins said, “Solutions seldom drop miracle-like into people’s lives.”⁶¹

Instead God calls people to figure things out and to make choices, to prudently plan the way forward. Aristotle described prudence as, “That virtue of the understanding which enables men to come to wise decisions...”⁶² Prudence is defined by Merriam-Webster as “careful good judgment that allows someone to avoid danger or risks; the ability to govern and discipline oneself by the use of reason...,” or as Proverbs 14:8 declares, “The wisdom of the prudent is to plan their way.” Prudence is wise planning, beginning with the end in mind. The Psalmist exhorts the person who fears God to recognize the reality of their responsibility to God and “to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” A coach provides the support structure and disciplined process of inquiry for a planning process that translates desire into vision, vision into goals, goals into action, and action into life-change. Hall, Cooper and McElveen said it well. “The coaching relationship has an inherent reflective nature because it creates space for the person being coached to slow down, get focused, and think through the journey. Out of this focused thought come intentional actions.”⁶³

Because the coach believes that God is working in the client, and the process has already begun, the coach’s job is to simply bring it forth. The coach is trained to *ask not tell* a person about the right path, because to tell someone what they need to do takes

⁶¹ Gary R. Collins, *Christian Coaching: Helping Others Turn Potential into Reality*, 2nd ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2009), 36.

⁶² *Rhetoric*, Book I Chapter 9 sect 1365 line 20 in Modern Library College Editions, 57.

⁶³ Hall, Copper and McElveen, *Faith Coaching*, 198.

their responsibility from them. Advice-giving says, “You are not the expert with the answer, I am. You can’t help yourself, but you need me.” It also breeds dependence on the advice-giver, the opposite of empowering responsibility. Since God created humans in his image, with a creative mind and capacity to choose, and a destiny to explore and discover, it can be dehumanizing to tell a responsible person what they are to do. Furthermore, giving advice risks imposing another agenda over God’s. Coaching is a relational process that avoids these pitfalls by asking instead of telling. By listening and showing respect for the client’s opinion the coach is able to overcome their demoralization and powerlessness, and inspire confidence to make their own choices, take responsibility to solve their problems, and achieve their destiny.

Section Summary

The story so far shows the creation, fall and redemption of human beings in their relationships, destiny and responsibility. People were made for relationships that reflect the love shared within the divine community. They were given a broad destiny to fulfill in the world, to rule and transform it as God’s stewards. Humans were given responsibility to live out this destiny, each in their own unique way in relationship with others. But instead they rebelled against their Creator, causing human relations to become alienated by autonomy, human destiny to devolve to idolatry and death, and human responsibility to descend into denial and blindness. The Apostle Paul summarized the result in Ephesians chapter 2. People became “dead through their

trespasses and sins.”⁶⁴ People were “separated...alienated... strangers.”⁶⁵ Human destiny was detoured to “following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient.”⁶⁶ Human responsibility was reduced to bondage, fulfilling “the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses.”⁶⁷

“But God, being rich in mercy,”⁶⁸ came to our help, beginning the work of restoration in Israel. The promises and covenants he made with them became the basis of a restored relationship with humanity, teaching them to love God and neighbor. Christian coaching promotes living that love ‘with’ and ‘for’ others. God invited Israel to inherit the Promised Land, which offered a taste of the promised new creation and a step toward restored human destiny. Christian coaching helps people see their life and purpose within this hope and overcome the obstacles of a fallen world to achieve their destiny. To empower human *responsibility* God gave grace to humanity to find and implement wisdom. Christian coaching offers practical tools to do that, taking an inquiring approach to discovering what is true and choosing a prudent path forward.

When Israel failed to live loyally in covenantal relationship, destiny and responsibility with God his plan of redemption of the world appeared to falter. The

⁶⁴ Ephesians 2:1.

⁶⁵ Ephesians 2:12.

⁶⁶ Ephesians 2:2.

⁶⁷ Ephesians 2:3.

⁶⁸ Ephesians 2:4.

prophets proclaimed that Israel had become subject to the same sin that imprisoned the rest of humanity.⁶⁹ But God did not abandon his purpose to redeem the world through a descendant of Adam⁷⁰ and the seed of Abraham.⁷¹ Woven throughout the story of Israel's failure is was the promise of more to come.

Redemption by God the Son

Father, you loved the world so much that in the fullness of time you sent your only Son to be our Savior. Incarnate by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, he lived as one of us, yet without sin. To the poor he proclaimed the good news of salvation; to prisoners, freedom; to the sorrowful, joy. To fulfill your purpose he gave himself up to death; and, rising from the grave, destroyed death, and made the whole creation new.

Jesus of Nazareth, Israel's Messiah, summed up the human race in himself in order to reverse the Fall. Paul described how in Ephesians chapter two. For those who were "dead in trespasses," God "made us alive with Christ,"⁷² and those who were separated from the love of God have, in Jesus, been "brought near."⁷³ Prayer D summarizes what Jesus did to accomplish this. He: 1) "lived as one of us," 2) "proclaimed" a message of hope, and 3) "gave himself up to death to make the whole creation new." The section that follows will show how the discipline of Christian

⁶⁹ The Apostle Paul put the finishing touches on that message in Rom 3; 5:20; and 7:7-25.

⁷⁰ Genesis 3:15.

⁷¹ Genesis 12:3.

⁷² Ephesians 2:5.

⁷³ Ephesians 2:13.

coaching is founded upon these realities and works to bring them to bear in people's lives.

Jesus Lived as One of Us

Father, you loved the world so much that in the fullness of time you sent your only Son to be our Savior. Incarnate by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, he lived as one of us, yet without sin.

When Jesus was “incarnate by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary” the second person of the Trinity joined humanity in the here-and-now, to restore the breached *relationship* with God. That baby literally embodied the restored, one-flesh relationship between God and man. By his death Jesus atoned for the sin that separates God from humanity, affecting their reconciliation.⁷⁴ For the purposes of this project, our focus will rest on the concrete ways in which Jesus “lived as one of us” in relationship with others. Since he lived “without sin,” his example models for humanity what restored relationship with God and others looks like in practice. Jesus demonstrated tangible care for each individual. He entered into their lives, adapting himself with remarkable flexibility to their varied circumstances. No two conversations were alike. No two solutions were ever the same.⁷⁵ While being realistic about their limitations and failures, Jesus never ridiculed people or motivated them through guilt or fear. He engaged in “partnership with a purpose.”⁷⁶ His confidence in them inspired

⁷⁴ Romans 5:10-11.

⁷⁵ Edward Shuppe, *The Practical Teaching Methods of Jesus* (presentation, South Atlantic District, n.d.).

⁷⁶ Collins, *Christian Coaching*, 77.

people to reach beyond their own expectations. By relating with people in these ways, Jesus began to build a new community through which the world is being reconciled. He called it the *ekklesia*, his new family. In his farewell discourse in John's gospel, Jesus prayed for this fellowship of friends:

I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

The unity of this community is explicitly rooted in the unity of the Divine Community. In C.S. Lewis' terms, in the previous section, Jesus' friends are rejoining the divine dance. Jesus sent this community outward to the world charged with bringing news of Messiah's reign, "'immersing' them in the name of the Father Son and Holy Spirit,"⁷⁷ sharing the journey with each person back into relationship with God and each other in Christ.

This is the mission of Christian coaching. And these are the qualities that define how Christian coaching fulfills that mission. Coaches are trained to imitate Jesus, practicing "incarnational servanthood." Like Jesus, the Christian coach approaches each person as an individual. By asking questions and practicing genuine listening coaches are able to get in touch with people "where they are" and attentively walk their journey with them. Bob and Megan Tschannen-Moran described evocative coaching: "Evocative coaches come alongside teachers, matching their energy, emotion, pacing, and style, until such a strong bond of trust is created that all suspicion and resistance is

⁷⁷ Matthew 29:18.

eliminated...Such presence and connection are essential prerequisites to everything else.”⁷⁸ They summarize that mindset, stance and those skills as expressing, in one word, “empathy.” Coaches thus demonstrate to their clients, “I am WITH you.” Seen in this light, one coach realized that Jesus was “the perfect life coach.”⁷⁹

Jesus was incarnated to restore human destiny.

Jesus helped people see their *destiny* and take steps to live it out. He gave ordinary people an entirely new way of looking at their lives in this world and the future, enabling them to literally “rise above” their circumstances to achieve grandeur unimagined.⁸⁰ For instance, Jesus saw in Peter things Peter could not imagine. Peter’s vocational horizon did not extend much further than his boat on the Sea of Galilee and the next catch of fish. But Jesus saw much greater potential: “I will make you fish for men” in a mission that would lead Peter all the way to Rome in witness as a prisoner of the Emperor. Jesus asked Peter a powerful question that drew forth the confession that became the foundation of the community of the new humanity: “Who do you say I am?”⁸¹ Jesus walked with Peter every step of his difficult journey, even through his failure and betrayal, drawing (and restoring) him into *relationship*, unveiling his *destiny*,

⁷⁸ Tschannen-Moran, *Evocative Coaching*, 32.

⁷⁹ Laurie Beth Jones, *Jesus: Life Coach* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 45.

⁸⁰ That vision of optimism and progress undergirds the unprecedented advances undertaken by those portions of humanity shaped by the sustained social influence of Christianity. Christians have, over the centuries, applied themselves in their calling from God to an unprecedented array of innovations and improvements of human study, science, social improvement and technological advance. See Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason* (New York, NY: Random House, 2006).

⁸¹ Matthew 16:15-16.

and empowering his *responsibility* to fulfill it. All these coalesced at breakfast on the beach of the Sea of Galilee. With the smell of a charcoal fire in his nostrils, evoking the fire that burned the night he denied the Lord, Jesus asked Peter a series of questions that accessed his heart, explored his identity, uncovered his desire, and pinpointed his destiny. It began with a question about his identity: "Do you love me more than these?" Peter had earlier expressed a sense of superiority over his peers: "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you."⁸² And all the other disciples said the same. Peter, however, learned in the betrayal that his earlier identity was ill-founded on bravado, violence and power. By the charcoal fire on the beach,⁸³ Jesus's core relational question, "Do you love me?" worked in Peter's heart to unlock his true destiny. With each question Jesus helped Peter grasp that destiny: "Feed my sheep." Despite his failure, Jesus continued in loving relationship with Peter, calling him to take responsibility and embrace his destiny.⁸⁴

A Christian coach seeks to do the same. Tony Stoltzfus said, "Coaching is a conscious imitation of the way that Christ looks at us and the way that God develops

⁸² Matthew 26:35.

⁸³ Jesus is creating an experience for Peter that will heal his heart from the previous experience Peter had of denying Jesus. Of the five senses, the olfactory sense is the most evocative of memories. Perhaps the fire helped access the horror of that moment in the Sanhedrin's court, so Jesus could touch his heart, heal and restore him to relationship, destiny and responsibility.

⁸⁴ Jesus' approach was consistent with God's approach in the Old Testament. Time and again, we see God believing in people and what they can become in spite of their doubts and failures. God saw potential in Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Gideon, David, Jeremiah that they themselves could not imagine. Through relational engagement God summoned forth in them their sense of destiny and inspired them to take responsibility for acting to serve God's people and to share his purposes in the world.

leaders. It's a relationship centered on helping people discover and fulfill their destiny...."⁸⁵ The coach purposefully engages people in their present circumstances, with all the difficulties and challenges and uncertainties, and helps them find God's grace and presence in those circumstances. Like Jesus so often did, the Christian coach asks questions that clarify issues, stimulate thought, surface desires, enable the client to envision future possibilities, clarify their mission, improve their skills, and stimulate their awareness and responsibility. Collins described a coach in terms that could be used of Jesus in his interactions with others:

Our challenge as coaches is to try looking at people from God's point of view. He knows our sin, our foolishness, our struggles, and our hard-heartedness, but he doesn't give up. Despite our failures, he believes in the potential of the people he created. The coach who has a similar view point can bring incredible transformation to his or her clients...The best coaches enable others to envision the future, think positively, and imagine brand new ways of doing things...guiding people to look at things from new perspectives.⁸⁶

As Collins noted, one of the most powerful exercises a coach can use is called Envisioning the Ideal Future. People get stuck when they think within their present, here-and-now limitations. The coach asks the client to "Describe your ideal future," without trying to figure out how to get there. The coach encourages the client to use vivid, visual language to see themselves in that future, to explore in detail what it would look like, and how it would feel to "be there." Often just picturing the ideal future energizes the person

⁸⁵ Stoltzfus, *Leadership Coaching*, 7-8.

⁸⁶ Collins, *Christian Coaching*, 36-37. As we will see in chapter three, Appreciative Inquiry guides us to focus on "the best of what is" and "the best of what can be" to inspire positive energy and hope. Christian realism, however, is not inclined to focus exclusively on the positive but seeks to "get real" about negative aspects as well.

and inspires fresh, creative thinking about how to get there. When people picture their ideal, their motivation to reach it skyrockets, as does their willingness to tackle obstacles they would not otherwise have dared to face. Tschannen-Moran put it well in their book *Evocative Coaching*. Imagining the best of what can be, “elevates energy, improves mood, unleashes creativity, and bolsters both initiative and resilience...It takes big dreams to stir hearts and move people to action.”⁸⁷ This vision of the future and the motivation it generates becomes the basis for setting goals and taking action to achieve them.⁸⁸ The coach encourages the client to accept responsibility for the outcome, not to blame or wait for others to take action on their behalf.

In the incarnation Jesus honored human *responsibility*.

When Jesus “lived as one of us” he accepted humanity’s limitations for himself. Paul cited a hymn in Philippians that exclaimed how Jesus “emptied himself” of divine privileges and capacities in order to serve.⁸⁹ “Jesus is not the superhuman repository of all knowledge that some might expect. Instead, we find a Jesus who admits ignorance and asks questions. A whole lot of questions.”⁹⁰ He learned by taking an inquiring approach to life, asking questions to get to know the people around him. He asked questions because there were things he didn’t know. When confronted by a man in

⁸⁷ Tschannen-Moran, *Evocative Coaching*, 156-157.

⁸⁸ In psychological parlance this is called “emotional arousal” and it is a vital change process in Prochaska, Norcross and DiClemente’s system in *Changing for Good* (28, 115). See chapter three for a summary of coaching-compatible techniques for emotional arousal.

⁸⁹ Philippians 2:6-8.

⁹⁰ Conrad Gempf, *Jesus Asked What He Wanted to Know* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 20.

need of healing he asked, “How long has he been like this?” When faced by a hungry crowd Jesus asked his disciples, “How many loaves do you have?” When his followers were debating some issue, he asked “What were you arguing about along the road?” Guthrie said, “Not knowing demonstrates the authenticity of his human nature.”⁹¹

Though limited in the incarnation, Jesus’ powers of observation and intuition were nevertheless superior to ours because they were unclouded by selfishness or self-deception. So if Christian coaches are to learn like he did, they must ask all the more and listen all the more intently. The coach doesn’t make a diagnosis or push an agenda but, from a stance of humility, like Jesus, explores the client’s values and looks for signs of what God is doing in the client’s life. The solution to a person’s problem might look simple from the outside, but the coach keeps asking and listening and encourages the client craft her own solution. Tony Stoltzfus described how this works. “I’ve been in so many coaching appointments when I thought the problem was simple and I had the solution. But because I was disciplined enough to bite my tongue and listen, I saw the client create an elegant, effective solution I wouldn’t have thought of in a million years.”⁹² The list below identifies how the “asking” approach is different from the more familiar “telling” paradigm.⁹³

The “Telling” Paradigm says:

⁹¹ Stan Guthrie, *All that Jesus Asks: How His Questions Can Teach and Transform Us* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2010), 60.

⁹² Stoltzfus, *Leadership Coaching*, 56. Tschannen-Moran confirmed this same experience: “When teachers are entrusted with personal responsibility, deep thinking, self-discovery, and self-efficacy, they find better answers and create better possibilities than any that could be handed to them by others” (*Evocative Coaching*, p. xxii)

⁹³ See Stoltzfus, “Assumptions About Change,” Stoltzfus, *Leadership Coaching*, 24.

1. My own knowledge and experience lets me accurately discern what you need to change and how to change it.
2. You just need right information to make right choices.
3. My value to you is in the knowledge, life stories, ideas, and wisdom I can deliver to you in a convincing way.
4. You can't solve this without my help.
5. Change is merely a choice – with the right answers, you'll succeed.

The Coaching Paradigm says:

1. It's not my job to figure out what you should do: you're responsible for your life.
2. Transformation is a function of experience and relationship (teachable moments), not information.
3. My value to you is in helping you draw from your own knowledge, life experience, ideas and wisdom.
4. You are able to steward the life God has given you.
5. Successful change is more a function of support and motivation than information.

The discipline of asking rather than telling serves the larger purpose of recognizing and affirming a person's *responsibility*. In every relationship, Jesus honored personal responsibility. He never compelled people to act against their will. When faced with the opportunity to engage a wealthy young man of influence, Jesus spoke plainly of the cost of discipleship and let the man choose. Though moved by affection for the man, Jesus recognized his responsibility to make his own choice and watched him walk away.⁹⁴ Like Jesus, the Christian coach assumes that people have compelling reasons for the choices they make, that there is an inner logic and rationale. A coach seeks to discover what values the person is pursuing, and asks questions to draw forth the person's own sense of what is important, what dreams they hope to achieve. Once the

⁹⁴ Mark 10:21-22.

coach has encouraged the client to articulate this ideal future, the next step is to help him take responsibility for that vision by asking more questions to help him to refine the dream into a goal that can be achieved. Stoltzfus said, “A goal is the end toward which your efforts are directed, the finishing line of a race, a picture of where you are headed. Setting a goal is making a decisive choice to reach a certain end...Coaching is a goal-driven process because at every point you are explicitly working toward specific objectives.”⁹⁵ To set a goal is to embrace our destiny from God (or some specific slice of it). In faith, a person commits to a path into the future that relies on their own internal resources, but also brings God’s power to bear in achieving it. The best goals are S.M.A.R.T. goals. This acronym is a helpful format for the coach to guide the client in making goals that are: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-specific. Stoltzfus described how, “Your job as a coach is to focus the coaching conversation around that goal so that the client develops and carries out the kinds of action steps that bring the person to the goal.”⁹⁶ Stoltzfus distilled five reasons why being goal-driven is vital to coaching effectively:

1. Clarity. A goal represents a decisive by the client to pursue a particular end.
2. Power. Declaring a goal unleashes God’s power on the client’s behalf.
3. Motivation. Visualizing the future motivates the client it.
4. A Mandate. A goal gives a clear picture of the client’s priorities, a mandate for how to focus the coaching conversation, and boundaries to stay within.
5. Action. Clear goals make it easy to develop effective action steps. It’s hard to plan if you don’t know where you’re going!⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Stoltzfus, *Leadership Coaching*, 128. This stage corresponds to Design Thinking in Tschannen-Moran’s Evocative Coaching system.

⁹⁶ Stoltzfus, *Leadership Coaching*, 128.

⁹⁷ Stoltzfus, *Leadership Coaching*, 129.

In Jesus God was incarnate to restore human relationships, destiny and responsibility. Committed to working in partnership with Jesus, the Christian coach practices incarnational servanthood being “with” the client, asking questions that help people envision their ideal future, and choose goals to achieve it. But Jesus didn’t just live with us. He also had a message to proclaim.

Jesus Proclaimed

To the poor, he proclaimed the good news of salvation;
to prisoners, freedom; to the sorrowful, joy.

Jesus came to proclaim a message, but often used an “asking” rather than a “telling” approach to engage with people. Paul said “[Christ] came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near”⁹⁸ and Mark summarized Jesus’ message as “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news.”⁹⁹ For a man with a message to proclaim, however, Jesus asked a lot of questions! In fact, “Nothing was more characteristic of Jesus’ speaking than the fact that he constantly asked questions.”¹⁰⁰ Conrad Gempf noted that there are 67 episodes of dialogue in the gospel of Mark. In 50 of those conversations Jesus asked questions.¹⁰¹ In Luke’s gospel the first words recorded out of Jesus’ mouth were questions. In his early teen years

⁹⁸ Ephesians 2:17.

⁹⁹ Mark 1:15.

¹⁰⁰ Gempf, *Jesus Asked*, 23.

¹⁰¹ Gempf, *Jesus Asked*, 23.

Jesus was drawn to the Temple where he was “sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.”¹⁰² When confronted by his parents Jesus responded by asking more questions, which surfaced their assumptions, and drew forth from them insight into his reasons for being there.¹⁰³ Gempf concluded, “Moses wanted to tell you the Law of God. Prophets were always telling you what the Lord was saying. But apparently if you met Jesus on the street, he was more likely to ask you something than tell you something.”¹⁰⁴ In nearly every exchange with his friends, enemies, or the mercurial crowd, Jesus asked questions to guide the conversation. “Jesus was the master of asking the right questions.”¹⁰⁵

Jesus likely asked questions because they open people’s minds to new perspectives and discoveries in ways that didactic statements often do not. Marcus Borg said Jesus’ parables and questions, “invite the audience to make a judgment,” and were “an interactive form of teaching...They tease the mind into active thought to engage the listener in the question, ‘What do you think?’... [They] provoked interaction among hearers and between the hearers and Jesus.”¹⁰⁶ Jesus’ parables were “storied

¹⁰² Luke 2:47.

¹⁰³ Luke 2:49.

¹⁰⁴ Gempf, *Jesus Asked*, 19.

¹⁰⁵ Jason Ostrander, *99 Questions Jesus Asked* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), i. Malcom Knowles began developing his theory of adult learning by observing how Jesus, and many ancient teachers like Confucius, Socrates, Cicero, and others “perceived learning to be a process of mental inquiry, not passive reception of transmitted content. Accordingly, they developed techniques for engaging learners in inquiry;” *The Adult Learner*, 34.

¹⁰⁶ Marcus Borg, *Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teachings, and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 152-153.

questions” providing imaginative content, which pushes the hearer to ponder the question, which is sometimes explicit and often implicit in the riddle. The parable provokes a response. It makes the hearer responsible for the answer, or insight.

Farnham, Hull, McLean and Ward wrote:

Probing questions engage us in ways that help us to discover things for ourselves so that [what is discovered] becomes our own and bears authority for us. Answers provided by others seldom carry the same weight. Good questions can open us up to the creative flow of the Spirit. Well-framed questions can draw the entire group into a search for truth that enables its members to develop fuller insight together. Then answers and actions may follow more serviceably.¹⁰⁷

Jesus’ powerful questions created relational connection, incited destiny-oriented insight and discovery, and stimulated ownership.

Jesus asked questions to draw people into *relationship*. “Thought-provoking inquiries...build the relationship because people feel respected, understood, appreciated, and heard.”¹⁰⁸ Asking a question shows genuine interest in the person, and in turn, attracts the persons’ interest in the questioner. “Good questions, such as Jesus asked, create dialogue.”¹⁰⁹ Jesus’ questions served as a point of contact with stranger and friend alike, to open the door to deeper relationship. For example, when Jesus was walking near Jericho he faced a blind man by the side of the road, shouting out for mercy. Jesus asked what might seem an obvious question, “What do you want me to do

¹⁰⁷ Suzanne G. Farnham, Stephanie Hull, and R. Taylor McLean, *Grounded in God: Listening Hearts for Group Deliberations*, revised (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1996), 19.

¹⁰⁸ Collins, *Christian Coaching*, 86.

¹⁰⁹ Guthrie, *All that Jesus Asks*, 16.

for you?”¹¹⁰ The man’s needs, one would think, were obvious, so why ask the question? Stan Guthrie sees the answer in the fact that Jesus was not just doing miracles, he was building relationships. “‘Lord,’” the blind man replies, “‘Let me recover my sight.’ And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him, glorifying God.” Guthrie concluded, “The relationship, brought out by the question, both precedes and follows the miracle. The man knew Jesus and, because of that knowledge, followed. The miracle, compared to his real need for relationship, is almost incidental.”¹¹¹ In another instance, when Jesus asked his disciples, discouraged and weary after a long night of fishing, “Friends, haven’t you have any fish?”¹¹² Jesus knew the answer, but he asked, not to gain information, but to draw them closer in relationship. Or consider how Jesus dealt with his grieving friends on the road to Emmaus. He engaged them with questions. “He was allowing his friends to process their grief.” Guthrie asks, “Do we walk beside others who are suffering with the same kind of patient gentleness?”¹¹³ That is exactly what the discipline of Christian coaching inculcates in its practitioners: the mindset and skills to share people’s journey of discovery.

Coaching trains people in the skills of asking and listening. Asking questions enables the coach to hear and understand another person and to thus draw closer to

¹¹⁰ Luke 18:35-43.

¹¹¹ Guthrie, *All that Jesus Asks*, 94.

¹¹² John 21:5.

¹¹³ Guthrie, *All that Jesus Asks*, 97.

them. Tony Stoltzfus said, “All of us want to be heard. We long to be accepted, to be known and valued for who we are...our ability to change and to operate at our maximum creativity and productivity is highly dependent on being in a supportive environment.”¹¹⁴ In the field of adult learning Raymond Wlodkowski identified listening as one of the most important skills for expressing *empathy*, which is one of the five pillars of facilitating learning. He calls it “listening for understanding,” which “avoids judging people according to a conceptual framework of our own devising and allows us to become fascinated with how things look to learners. We can be genuinely intrigued by how learners make meaning out of ideas and experience. Such respectful interest can elicit deeper dialogue and mutual understanding.”¹¹⁵

To illustrate the power of questions for Christian coaching, Collins turned the word ‘hear’ into an acronym. When we H.E.A.R. another person we discover their:

H – hopes and dreams about how things could be better

E – energies and passions that inspire the person

A – attitudes and abilities that shape one’s vision of the future but may be frustrated in the present

R – routines, habits, and ways of doing things that might need to change

¹¹⁴ Stoltzfus, *Leadership Coaching*, 144. In a similar vein, Tschannen-Moran said, “Connection is a universal human need that people seek to meet throughout the course of our lifetimes. Evocative coaching accepts and applies that view to the conversational process. It recognizes the power of listening, empathy, and inquiry to establish connection and foster growth” (p. 13).

¹¹⁵ Raymond J. Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 67.

When we “hear” someone we deepen our relationship with them.¹¹⁶ Asking and listening build intimacy and trust. Greater intimacy leads to deeper insight, which leads us to the next reason why Jesus asked questions.

Jesus also asked questions to incite *destiny*-oriented insight in others. Jesus’ questions drew people’s attention deeper inside themselves, exploring their unspoken assumptions, motivations, desires and values. Assumptions are like a pair of eye glasses. People don’t ordinarily look AT them, but only look THROUGH them. They simply assume them. Jesus’ questions often forced people to examine their assumptions, to take off their glasses and inspect them closely. Wright notes, “The resulting sense of disorientation can be distressing. It can lead to radical change. It shakes the very foundation of persons and societies. Sometimes, it seems, it can turn persecutors into apostles....”¹¹⁷ Take for instance Jesus’ conversation with the sons of Zebedee. They came with a request: “we want you to do for us whatever we ask.”¹¹⁸ Jesus responded with questions. First he asked, “What do you want me to do for you?” which gave James and John the chance to assess their motivation. Jesus then asked, “Can you drink the cup I must drink?” which forced them to envision their destiny. In another instance, Jesus was face-to-face with a man with a long-term disability. “When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time,

¹¹⁶ To begin listening, as Stoltzfus said, “we must turn off the conversation in our heads and give our full, undivided attention to what the other person is saying.” Stoltzfus, *Leadership Coaching*, 152.

¹¹⁷ Wright, *Paul*, 34.

¹¹⁸ Mark 10:35.

he asked him, 'Do you want to get well?'"¹¹⁹ This was not a throwaway question, but a query exploring the man's motivation to change, prodding him to make his own decision to move forward from his sedentary spot. In conversation after conversation, Jesus asked questions to help people sort out their conflicting values: "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?"¹²⁰ Or, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath; to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?"¹²¹ He asked questions to identify people's motives: "why are you trying to trap me?"¹²² Jesus' questions prodded people to assimilate new realities into their world view. When confronted about fasting Jesus asked a question, "Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while he is with them?"¹²³ This reframed the whole situation, helping his interlocutors see fasting from perspectives that they hadn't considered before. He then told a parable that left them with a riddle requiring further reflection. By asking them for the answer instead of spelling it out for them, Jesus empowered people to grapple with their own assumptions, to draw their own conclusions, to grasp the reality he wanted them to see, to glimpse the future, and to dream of what could be.

Jesus had a message, but instead of declaring it outright, he often asked questions that directed his followers to discover and apply it for themselves. Jesus

¹¹⁹ John 5:5-6.

¹²⁰ Luke 6:46.

¹²¹ Mark 3:1-4; 11:27-33.

¹²² Mark 12:14-16.

¹²³ Luke 5:34.

asked his hearers to **supply the premises** for the truth he wanted them to see, like when he asked Peter about the poll tax: “Whom do kings tax, their children or others?”¹²⁴ In other instances Jesus laid out the premises, often in the form of a parable, and asked his hearers to **draw the conclusions**. The parable of the Good Samaritan is the best example. “Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?”¹²⁵ The conclusion then became the basis of his application. Jesus used questions to force people to think their way through to the message they needed to hear, the answers to the questions they had asked, or to reconsider the accusations they had made. “In story after story he used the obvious question to stop people in their tracks and make them think again about the implications.”¹²⁶ This is how Jesus used questions to incite destiny-oriented insight.

The Christian coach also asks questions to provoke insight to help the client to not only discover his destiny, but to work on fulfilling it. Once the client has articulated his ideal future and crafted SMART goal(s) the coach broadens the conversation to stimulate more creative thinking. Tony Stoltzfus used the image of a funnel to describe the process that follows. It’s called “The Coaching Funnel,” illustrated in this diagram:¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Matthew 17:25. See also Mark 4:21-22; 11:17; 12:9; Matthew 5:46-47; 11:7-9; 12:11-12, 27-29; Luke 6:32-4; 11:5-13; 11:40; 14:28, 31; 16:11-12; 17:7-9.

¹²⁵ Luke 10:36. See also Matthew 23:17-19; 22:28; Luke 6:39.

¹²⁶ Gempf, *Jesus Asked*, 48.

¹²⁷ Tony Stoltzfus, *Coaching Questions* (Warm Springs, VA: Pegasus Creative Arts, 2008), 30. The diagram below is the author’s adaptation of Stoltzfus’ design.



Figure 3. The Coaching Funnel

The coach asks questions that prompt the client to **explore** possibilities for implementing the goal. “Once a goal is set, it’s time to fully explore the situation, what led up to it, and what is going on under the surface. Exploration can involve probing both the external situation and the client’s internal responses to what is happening.”¹²⁸ The coach listens for signs of significance, clues of what is most important to the client, like strong emotion words, or repeated phrases. Then he asks follow-up questions to help them zero in on what is most important in their own thoughts and words. The goal is “to extend the client’s own thinking process, not insert your own thoughts or ideas into the picture. Ask short, open questions that generate long answers. Aim to get more information out on the table, not develop solutions. That happens later. You want to create an opportunity for the client to go ‘boldly where he’s never gone before.’”¹²⁹ Stoltzfus identified three characteristics of great probing questions. They use the client’s own words instead of trying to restate them. They are succinct, instead

¹²⁸ Stoltzfus, *Coaching Questions*, 48.

¹²⁹ Stoltzfus, *Leadership Coaching*, 190.

of complex, or rambling. They are neutral, instead of implying value judgments over what the client said. Pursued in this way, the process of exploration will yield multiple **potential solutions** for action steps the client might take to fulfill the goal. The coach pushes the client to name at least five options, realizing that by digging deep for options the client is more likely to discover new insights and develop new solutions.

Jesus also asked questions to stimulate ownership, encouraging people to take *responsibility*. He prompted people to make up their own minds and to take action, not by command but by consent. Deutschman observed, “People don’t resist change. They resist *being* changed.”¹³⁰ People tend to resist change when it is imposed upon them by others. People are “more likely to try new things, and persist in the effort, if they’re the ones who come up with the plan.”¹³¹ When people hear the answer coming from their own lips, they more readily take ownership of it. A well-asked question can accomplish this, helping people move themselves from insight to action. For instance, Mark recorded a remarkable sequence of teachable moments during Jesus’ trip north of the Sea of Galilee.¹³² With the multitude following him for three days, Jesus presents a problem to his disciples, “If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way—and some of them have come from a great distance.” This statement left an implied question hanging in the air: “How are we going to feed them?” It stimulated in the disciples a sense of responsibility for the situation. He then asked them, “How many

¹³⁰ Alan Deutschman, “Making Change”, *Fast Company* 94 (May 2005): 94. Emphasis added.

¹³¹ Deutschman, “Making Change”, 94.

¹³² Mark 8:3 (ESV).

loaves do you have?" The question gave ownership of the problem to the disciples who began searching for solutions. On the boat ride back, Jesus and the disciples had an opportunity for reflection, after-the-fact:

Jesus said to them, 'Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes, and fail to see? Do you have ears, and fail to hear? And do you not remember?'¹³³ When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?' They said to him, 'Twelve.' 'And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?' And they said to him, 'Seven.' Then he said to them, 'Do you not yet understand?'¹³⁴

In peppering his disciples with these queries, Jesus practiced what Gempf called "rebuke by question."¹³⁵ Jesus could have declared the point to them more quickly, but questions were much more effective. He asked them to evaluate their situation and to search their hearts, take responsibility for their failures, and gain wisdom for the future.

Like Jesus, the Christian coach uses questions to raise awareness in the client of the need to change by opening up what might be a blind spot or a misshaped assumption. Such questions can help a person get back on course with fulfilling his goals, as well as to help the client move toward commitment and action. Picking up with the funnel diagram above, with the list of options developed during the **exploration** phase in hand, the coach turns the conversation with the client to the

¹³³ Notice that Jesus identified the organs of inquiry that God gave human beings to take responsibility for fulfilling their destiny. He assumed that they were responsible for using them to figure out the world around them and to make good decisions about their role in it.

¹³⁴ Mark 8:17-21 (ESV).

¹³⁵ Gempf, *Jesus Asked*, 33. See also the instance when: Jesus calmed the storm and asked, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" (Mark 4:40); or when he asked, "Peter are you asleep? Could you not watch with me?" (Mark 14:37); or when he asked the disciples, "You of little faith, why do you doubt?" (Matt 14:31).

evaluation phase. The coach asks the client to analyze the options she developed, selecting which options she would like to pursue. Stoltzfus said, “Help your clients make a decisive choice to pursue a certain course of action that leads toward their goal. A useful framework is “Could Do > Want to > Will Do.” This framework is like a series of filters to evaluate these options, the broadest of which starts by asking what the client “Could Do.” This filters out impossible options. The next filter taps into the client’s motivation, asking for a decision on which potential solution they “Want To” pursue. If the client doesn’t like an idea there is little sense in trying to pursue it. With the options that are left, the coach asks the client to make a commitment to what they “Will Do” to put their options into action.¹³⁶ This is the **decision** phase, in which the Christian coach, like Jesus, asks the client to move from goal to action.

In most conversations, Jesus related to the people around him with questions. Jesus’ inquiries stimulated his interlocutors to take steps to be active, rather than passive; heroic, rather than helpless; committed, rather than ambivalent; to think things through, rather than waiting for the answer from others. Jesus appeared to believe that the key to personal transformation is not gaining more information. It is life-changing relationships that inspire people to take responsibility for their lives and destiny. And questions powerfully facilitate all of the above, as described by MIT professor emeritus, Edgar Schein, “All my teaching and consulting experience has taught me that what builds a relationship, what solves problems, what moves things forward is *asking the*

¹³⁶ Stoltzfus, *Coaching Questions* p. 31.

right questions."¹³⁷ But Jesus did more than live among others and teach; he also died and rose from the grave.

Jesus Came to Make a New Creation

To fulfill your purpose he gave himself up to death; and,
rising from the grave, destroyed death, and made the whole
creation new.

The implications of Jesus' death and resurrection are inconceivably vast. They literally change everything. By dying and rising Jesus catalyzed the comprehensive process of restoring all God's creation to his original creative intention. The work of Jesus constitutes "the eschatological turning-point, the launching of God's new world."¹³⁸ Jürgen Moltmann put it this way: "The resurrection of Jesus indicates the beginning of a fundamental change in the conditions of possible experience."¹³⁹ Much of the New Testament was written to describe what that change looked like in actual fact for those early Christian communities. This section draws out some of the implications of the new creation as they relate to Christian coaching today, showing how people's *relationships* are transformed, our human *destiny* is restored, and our *responsibility* is renewed.

¹³⁷ Edgar H. Schein, *Humble Inquiry: The Gentle Art of Asking Instead of Telling* (San Francisco, CA: Barrett-Koehler Publishers, 2013), 4.

¹³⁸ Wright, *Paul*, 524.

¹³⁹ Jürgen Moltmann, *Sun of Righteousness, Arise!* Trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2010), 46.

Relationships Transformed

The new creation is fundamentally a relational reality in which alienation from the fall is finally overcome in the *ekklesia*, which Jesus is building to reconcile the world. Jesus is gathering a new community of people, growing out of and well beyond the ethnic life of Israel. N.T. Wright noted:

At the heart of it all...is *koinonia*, a ‘partnership’ or ‘fellowship’ which is not static, but which enables the community of those who believe to grow together into a unity across the traditional divisions of the human race. This is a unity which is nothing other than the unity of Jesus Christ and his people – the unity, indeed, which Jesus won for his people precisely by identifying with them and so, through his death and resurrection, effecting reconciliation between them and God.¹⁴⁰

Paul described this new community in Ephesians 2 as originating in the lavish love of God, which created and now restores relationship with humanity. By dying and rising from death, Jesus overcame alienation, “brought near” the estranged¹⁴¹ and formed them together as “one new man.”¹⁴² He made us “fellow citizens” and “members” together of a new community.

This is the relational context within which the discipline of Christian coaching facilitates change. In the New Creation Jesus is Lord and master of every person, and he is “reconciling the world to himself.”¹⁴³ He is the third party, continually present, in every relationship. The Christian coach seeks to self-consciously take Jesus’ presence into

¹⁴⁰ Wright, *Paul*, 16.

¹⁴¹ Ephesians 2:13.

¹⁴² Ephesians 2:15.

¹⁴³ 2 Corinthians 5:19.

account in every relationship and the Christian coaching movement has developed disciplines for doing so in a practical way. Tony Stoltzfus has called Paul's self-description of his ministry in 2 Corinthians 5:16-21, "the New Testament mandate for coaches:"¹⁴⁴

So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

In it, we can see three ways in which the relational reality of the new creation influences Christian coaching. First, reconciliation is now the norm for being in relationship with others, and is thus the mission of the church. According to the catechism of the Book of Common Prayer, the Church's every effort aims "to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ."¹⁴⁵ The Christian coach shares this goal for the client. Being restored to relationship with God and others is the necessary condition of achieving the client's destiny and taking responsibility for life, but there are many obstacles to overcome. Relationships are dangerous. In the alienation following the fall, people often withdraw and retaliate. But Jesus began to change that by modeling love for his followers: "Greater love has no one than this but to lay down your life for your friends."

¹⁴⁴ See 52.

¹⁴⁵ BCP, 855.

The fact that Jesus is “not counting people’s sins against them,”¹⁴⁶ means his followers are responsible for giving the same gift to others. So he taught them to pray, “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” Paul urged the Romans, “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”¹⁴⁷ As Jesus’ followers forgive others they discover that in the Messiah there is hope for every relationship. Christian coaching builds on that hope. The Christian coach puts himself forward to be “with” and “for” the client to serve the person in the reconciliation of their relationships.

Second, the relational reality of the new creation encourages people to look at others through new eyes, focused on their destiny to become like Christ in the new creation. In the fall, humans judge others by their appearances. But Paul is saying, “From now on, we regard no one from a worldly point of view... if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come.”¹⁴⁸ Christians learn to see their own potential and the potential of others as part of the new creation. C.S. Lewis described human potential:

The dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ 2 Corinthians 5:19.

¹⁴⁷ Romans 12:18.

¹⁴⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:16-17.

¹⁴⁹ C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, rev (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1980), 45-46.

That “awe and circumspection” leads the Christian coach to engage a person patiently without judging their faults, seeing past a person’s failures to discover what God sees inside them. The coach uses an inquiring approach to draw forth a persons’ sense of destiny and stimulate their responsibility to act in relationship with God and others.

Third, participants in the new creation are given a new responsibility to serve others as ambassadors of the Messiah. Those in Christ are brought back into the divine dance so they can invite others to join in as well, through “the ministry of reconciliation.” As an apostle, Paul “proclaimed” in a corporate, public context, as his main way to “persuade others.” Most others in the Body of Christ, however, are called to spread the good news on a smaller scale, in other forms of interpersonal ministry, working primarily one-on-one, or in small groups. Like Paul, Christians seek to “be all things to all people,”¹⁵⁰ accommodating ourselves to others in order to serve them. In this endeavor, the coaching stance is highly adaptable, dedicated as it is, to asking and hearing, exploring and discovering the depths within each person. The client comes with various dreams and struggles, and the Christian coach, knowing that God is working to reconcile them, co-labors with God to achieve his purpose in people’s.

Destiny Restored

Being restored to right relationships, human beings are able to get back to the work envisioned in Genesis 1 and 2. When Paul spoke to the Ephesians about being

¹⁵⁰ 1 Corinthians 9:22.

God's "workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand for us to walk in"¹⁵¹ he put their lives into big-picture Biblical context. The *en Christos* is of massive significance. Jesus uniquely fulfilled human destiny when God "raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand...and placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything..."¹⁵² Paul here evokes Psalm 8:4-8, showing Jesus as the embodiment of humanity, fulfilling our destiny.¹⁵³ Being *en Christos*, human beings are restored to live out that destiny in the new creation, which Adam and Eve squandered in the original creation. In Paul's language in Ephesians, this is our "inheritance."¹⁵⁴ N.T. Wright described the scope of that "inheritance:"

The Messiah was promised the nations of the world as his inheritance. Paul, taking his cue from the worldwide scope of God's promise to Abraham, insists that those who share the Messiah's inheritance will be set in authority over the whole world...Paul restores human beings to the place they have in Genesis..."¹⁵⁵

In the fall humans were reduced to alienation, bondage, and delusion under idolatry, but *en Christos* mankind is being restored, to "become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."¹⁵⁶

¹⁵¹ Ephesians 2:10.

¹⁵² Ephesians 1:20, 22.

¹⁵³ See also Hebrews 2:5-9.

¹⁵⁴ Ephesians 1:14, 18; 3:6.

¹⁵⁵ Wright, *Paul*, 488.

¹⁵⁶ Ephesians 4:13.

The resurrection of Jesus was the beginning of the new creation and the restoration of human destiny. The new creation is the restored realm within which God's kingdom is coming and his will is being done, "on earth as it is in heaven." It is an "already" reality, which has begun. It is also a "not-yet" reality, which anticipates the time when the whole world is rescued from sin and death and thrives under God's rule, exercised through the Messiah's people.¹⁵⁷ Toward this end Christ's people work as "co-laborers with Christ" knowing "our labor is not in vain."¹⁵⁸ In the fall human destiny to "do work that lasts" was tragically cut short by death. Their names were forgotten and their labor turned to dust. But with the resurrection came hope to rise victorious over death and to have their work endure. Jesus isn't just saving our "soul" but the whole human being, work and all. He is the "foundation" upon which each person is building the New Jerusalem with materials that will endure.¹⁵⁹ This vision infuses every effort with significance, and invests every struggle with potential and hope. This vision calls people to get their life back on the right track, learning to rise victorious over obstacles, and to be all they were made by God to be.

Christian coaching helps people live into the new creation. Collins defined coaching as "the art and practice of enabling individuals and groups to move from where they are to where God wants them to be."¹⁶⁰ God wants each person to lay hold

¹⁵⁷ Wright, *Paul*, 367.

¹⁵⁸ 1 Corinthians 15:58.

¹⁵⁹ See C.K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004).

¹⁶⁰ Collins, *Christian Coaching*, 23.

of whatever portion of their destiny is currently within their reach. The coaching process teaches how to look past the idolatrous distractions and obstacles that distort our vision of what is possible. Like Jesus did, the Christian coach asks questions leading to insight, helping a person to articulate and reframe their values, adopt new perspectives and ultimately be “renewed in their mind.”¹⁶¹ The Christian coach is learning to see people as God sees them, in light of the realities of creation, fall and redemption. “As coaches, we consciously choose to interact with our clients in terms of their destiny, not their problems. We get to know them at a deep level: their dreams.”¹⁶² People’s dreams often express their God-given sense of destiny. This perspective on the new creation helps coach and client see the challenges and opportunities of day-to-day life in the light of that big future. It gives the chance to start living it now. Collins said coaching “involves stimulating the imagination to dream of possibilities that seem way out of reach.”¹⁶³ The Christian coaching movement has developed a number of excellent destiny discernment tools that coaches and clients can use to sharpen a person’s sense of where God is calling them and how to step more and more into that role.¹⁶⁴

The Christian coach can ask people to imagine their life in the new creation. “What does your life look like when ‘God’s will is done on earth as in heaven’? Many Christians

¹⁶¹ Romans 12:1, 2.

¹⁶² Collins, *Christian Coaching*, 51.

¹⁶³ Collins, *Christian Coaching*, 208.

¹⁶⁴ See for example, *A Leader’s Life Purpose*, by Tony Stoltzfus.

think of 'the kingdom of God' in terms of an abstract "heaven" where people float on clouds praising God for all eternity. As we have seen, the Bible's vision, from bookend to bookend, is more concrete. It describes "eternal life" in terms of our life in this world transformed to conform to God's good intention expressed in the original creation. Because each person is made in God's image, their dream of an ideal future is, whether they know it or not, instinctively seeking after God's promise for the new creation. It is their personal picture of what life would look like redeemed from the fall. The Christian coach can leverage the concreteness of this vision to help people see their life today in continuity with a vision of that future restoration. Then coach and client can explore the client's place in that destiny. Life under God's curse, in an often dangerous, abusive and chaotic world, leaves people with a lot to overcome. They may often be mired in indecision, fear, failure, discouragement, unhealthy relationships, and self-destructive attitudes and behaviors. "Coaches specialize in working with people who feel stuck and want help in getting out of their ruts."¹⁶⁵ Believing in people's potential inspires hope in their ability to change. Focusing on goals empowers a client to be oriented toward the future not the past, increasing their capacity to move from "Here" to "There."

Responsibility Renewed

God's grace, now fully manifested in Jesus' achievement, summons all the people of the world to join Jesus in taking responsibility for the new creation.

¹⁶⁵ Collins, *Christian Coaching*, 37.

Something has happened that requires action, a response of believing obedience. N.T. Wright observed, “Through these events the cold, hard grip of ‘the present evil age’ has been broken, and humans from every quarter are summoned to belong to ‘the age to come’, the eschatological springtime that is already present in the Messiah and, through his Spirit, in and through his people.”¹⁶⁶

Human beings are being restored *en Christos* to the freedom and responsibility God gave Adam and Eve. For the primal parents of humanity, it was possible not to sin. But under the regime of evil, human beings were rendered “dead in transgressions and sins,” bound under “the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air,” and irresistibly inclined toward “gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts.”¹⁶⁷ It was impossible not to sin. Now *in Christos* people are delivered from the power of sin and are stepping into the new creation. As God’s gracious action has “made us alive with Christ...”¹⁶⁸ we are on a journey of restoration in collaboration with God, in which we are increasingly able to respond with believing obedience to the grace of God working in our lives. With that new possibility comes renewed responsibility. That was Paul’s point when he urged them to “live a life worthy of the calling you have received.”¹⁶⁹ In his letters Paul bored in on the particulars of

¹⁶⁶ Wright, *Paul*, 555.

¹⁶⁷ Ephesians 2:1-4.

¹⁶⁸ Ephesians 2:5-10.

¹⁶⁹ Ephesians 4:1.

what that life-change might look like. He exhorted the church in Rome, saying, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good pleasing and perfect will.”¹⁷⁰

In a similar vein, Paul told the Christians in Ephesus, “you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light, for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord.”¹⁷¹ Jesus’ followers are responsible to leave behind the “pattern of this world” and “the unfruitful works of darkness,” to become increasingly adept at *thinking* like citizens of the age to come, discerning and then embodying God’s will, *behaving* “as children of light.” The goal of this process is people being conformed to the image of God: “Be imitators of God, as beloved children.”¹⁷² This is the practical means by which the image of God, formed in humanity in creation but marred in the fall, is progressively restored in people.

Paul’s path to achieving this outcome was a process of corporate discernment where Christians think through and decide the issues before them. He told Christian communities that sprang up around the Empire to THINK. N.T. Wright hears Paul saying in Ephesians 5:10, “Think through what’s going to be pleasing to the Lord. Work it

¹⁷⁰ Romans 12:1, 2.

¹⁷¹ Ephesian 5:8-10.

¹⁷² Ephesians 5:1 (ESV).

out.”¹⁷³ These Christians “needed to do the hard work of thinking through their beliefs and values and their implications for life, community and mission.” They were “to think as age-to-come people rather than present-age people.”¹⁷⁴ Communities of Christ can only thrive if they are composed of people with renewed minds, who are able to think through each aspect of life and figure out how to speak and act, instead of being squeezed into the world’s mold. Wright said, “The Christian worldview compels people to think in a new way.” He described how that new way of thinking took shape in Christian communities, facilitating Christians to gain maturity by learning to struggle together through difficult issues rather than accept the answers on authority. Wright argued:

The “authority” of Paul did not consist in his providing lots of correct answers to puzzling questions. That would have left his converts, and subsequent generations, with no work to do on the questions he had answered, and no starting-point for the ones he didn’t. They would have remained radically and residually immature. Give someone a thought, and you help them for a day; teach someone to think and you transform them for life. Paul’s authority consisted in his setting up a particular framework and posing a specific challenge. Living as Messiah-people demanded, he would have said, that people work within that framework and wrestle with that challenge.¹⁷⁵

In cases where Christians, in Paul’s day or ours, want to skip thinking for themselves assuming that answers will come from heaven, or from leaders, or their own sentimental impulse, Paul urges them to take responsibility to conscientiously think

¹⁷³ N.T. Wright, *The Kingdom New Testament: A Contemporary Translation* (New York, NY: Harper One, 2011), 397.

¹⁷⁴ Wright, *Paul*, 567.

¹⁷⁵ Wright, *Paul*, 569.

through each issue and figure out what to do. This appears very similar to the prudent approach we saw in Proverbs, above. It is a corporate commitment to “speaking the truth in love” in relationship with other Christians:

Speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.¹⁷⁶

In fledgling Christian communities Christians were to practice discernment in the *relational context* of the divine community: “One Spirit... one Lord, one God and Father of all.”¹⁷⁷ Sharing one baptism, believing one faith, fixed on one hope, composing one body of Christ, the Christian community learns to “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.”¹⁷⁸ In this context of safety and trust and transparency people can “speak the truth,” dealing with hard realities within the embrace of a loving community. Through this process Christians “grow up” and “become mature” and are no longer “”¹⁷⁹

Christian coaching offers a disciplined approach for Christian leaders and communities to understand and learn to live what Jesus taught and to “speak the truth” in a non-judgmental way, which helps people, in turn, receive it in a non-defensive way. Following the inquiring approach Jesus took with the people around him, Christian

¹⁷⁶ Ephesians 4:15-16. We will have more to say on this under the heading “Destiny.”

¹⁷⁷ Ephesians 4:4-6.

¹⁷⁸ Ephesians 4:2.

¹⁷⁹ Ephesians 4:13-16.

coaching uses powerful questions to scrutinize the situation and the people involved and to draw forth insight regarding the prudent path forward.¹⁸⁰ We have seen how Jesus used it. Jesus asked questions and told stories that trained the disciples *how* to observe and think, provoking discovery and insight and inspiring a sense of ownership to take action.

Section Summary

In the previous two sections, we have seen the drama of creation and fall fulfilled in Jesus the Messiah. Philip Hughes summarized it beautifully:

Man in his fallenness has lost this perfection and this destiny; but all this loss is redemptively restored, and more than restored, in Christ, the true Image, in whom man's full stature is achieved and his eternal destiny secured, and to whose image the redeemed are being progressively conformed until at last they are brought to "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ," which is the perfection of their humanity...¹⁸¹

This second section has shown how Jesus did that, focusing attention on his incarnation, style of proclamation, and the new creation that began when he walked out of the grave. Along the way we have explored the implications of these for the practice of Christian coaching. By his **incarnation**, Jesus restored the divine-human relationship by being fully WITH people in the present reality of life, helping them see and embrace their destiny, and honoring their responsibility. Following Jesus' example, Christian coaching practices

¹⁸⁰ The writer of Hebrews describes this as a hallmark of "the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil..." Hebrews 5:14.

¹⁸¹ Phillip Hughes, *The True Image* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989) p. 113.

incarnational servanthood, being WITH the individual client, helping her envision the ideal future and then take responsibility for making it a reality by forming SMART goals. Jesus's **proclamation** of the coming Kingdom often engaged people with questions to draw them into relationship, to incite destiny-oriented insight, and to stimulate ownership and responsibility. Following Jesus' example, the Christian coach does the same, helping people explore what actions they might take to fulfill their goals, and asking them to commit to a course of action. By dying and rising from the grave Jesus began the **new creation**. In this new creation human relationships are transformed in the community of redeemed humanity. Christian coaching is adept at advancing the ministry of reconciliation, which is at the heart of this new community. In the new creation, Jesus is calling people to embrace their destiny. Christian coaching helps people do this with useful destiny discovery tools. The grace Jesus gives his people renews their responsibility, helping each person be transformed in their thinking. Christian coaching promotes this transformation by asking questions that prompt deep reflection and decision.

In the great story of the Bible, Jesus' work is the turning point. Because of it, "The present evil age' has lost its power to hold people captive, and the 'age to come' has broken in to rescue them...[but] this work is yet incomplete."¹⁸² Messiah's people are poised between the "already" and the "not yet", living in the tension between the two. In this age of overlap, the Holy Spirit is active as God's agent of change to advance God's kingdom. To that work we now turn.

¹⁸² Wright, *Paul*, 550.

Restored by God the Holy Spirit

And, that we might live no longer for ourselves, but for him who died and rose for us, he sent the Holy Spirit, his own first gift for those who believe, to complete his work in the world, and to bring to fulfillment the sanctification of all.

In this final section, we will see how the Holy Spirit applies the work of Jesus to his followers, and works through them to bring the New Creation to life in the world. We will detail the ways in which Christian Coaching facilitates that work, supporting the process of transformation in every aspect of a Christian's life.

Jesus prepared his disciples for his departure in the "Upper Room Discourse," recounted in chapters 13 through 17 of John's Gospel. Jesus was teaching his friends to anticipate certain fundamental realities in the new creation, which John characterized as, "eternal life," and "abundant life." Within John's presentation of Jesus' teaching that night, we can easily discern the familiar categories of relationship, destiny and responsibility. Jesus envisioned the change of *relationships* to come with the Holy Spirit, when the Father and Son will take up residence in his people who will be newly united in love. He spoke at length about the *destiny* of his people after his ascension. They will join Jesus doing the very works (and greater works!) he does, bearing much fruit so the world may come to know the truth. He forcefully explicated the *responsibility* they consequently bear to abide in Jesus and ask in his name for the resources needed to fulfill their destiny.¹⁸³

¹⁸³ John 14:13-14.

When Jesus ascended, his physical presence was relocated from earth to the realm of heaven, beginning the process of uniting them both, restoring God's creative intention for "the heavens and the earth." Though physically absent from the world, Jesus was able to maintain and intensify his presence with his people through the Holy Spirit, building on the Spirit's work in ages past. As Prayer D said, "...He sent the Holy Spirit...." From bookend to bookend of the Biblical narrative, God had been sending the Holy Spirit to accomplish his will, from the creation of the world to the formation of Israel, from the ministry of the prophets to the conception and ministry of Jesus. On Pentecost that same Spirit came upon his people with fresh power and pervasiveness, working to bring about the new creation, one person at a time. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit came as "Helper", who "lives with you and will be in you."¹⁸⁴ The Spirit came as "an eschatological reality, marking the turn of the ages"¹⁸⁵ bringing forth the new creation in the midst of the old. The presence of the Spirit, "which the world cannot accept,"¹⁸⁶ now marks those who are of "the age to come" as distinct from those who are "of the age that is passing away." The Holy Spirit is bringing the people of God into the new world Jesus is creating.

While Jesus in John's upper room discourse was looking ahead anticipating coming realities, the Apostle Paul, in his dense discussion in Romans chapter eight, was probing those realities in present experience trying to explain and apply them to the

¹⁸⁴ John 14:16-17.

¹⁸⁵ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 100.

¹⁸⁶ John 14:17.

situation in the church in Rome. In earlier chapters, Paul portrayed the results of Jesus' work, and in 8:11-17, he showed how the Spirit applies them to change Christian lives. He revealed how the Spirit is acting as the agent of change within the now-familiar pattern of human life: restoring human relationships, revealing human destiny and empowering human responsibility within the new creation. In this passage, Paul led with *responsibility*, writing, "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you. Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation...."¹⁸⁷ The Spirit gives a new responsibility, an "obligation" to live not according to the flesh, "to put to death the works of the flesh."¹⁸⁸ This responsibility is held in place in the believer's life by their Spirit-empowered *relationship* with God in verses 14-15:

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "*Abba*, Father."

The Spirit's work inside a person makes what Jesus did a here-and-now reality for them, facilitating their transformation. This relationship restores the *destiny* for which Christians were made in v 16-17:

The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

¹⁸⁷ Romans 8:11-12a.

¹⁸⁸ Romans 8:13.

In the discussion that follows we will explore the meaning and importance of the Holy Spirit's work, in those three categories. Along the way, we will observe how the discipline of Christian coaching is well-suited to facilitating a person's cooperation with the Spirit's work "to bring to fulfillment the sanctification of all." Paul makes the case that the Holy Spirit is the key to a human change. This section will demonstrate that cooperating with the Spirit's work is the key to Christian coaching.

The Spirit is Changing Our Relationship with God

As Jesus prepared the disciples for his departure, he promised a new relationship with God. In the history of salvation, God is drawing ever closer to human beings, granting increasing access. God's goal, as we have seen, is the full restoration of intimacy between the Creator and humanity. In the old covenant, God's persistent presence came as close as the Temple. In Jesus, the presence "walked among us." After Pentecost, God's presence actually lives within us. Filled with the Holy Spirit, people are now being energized to "live no longer for ourselves, but for him who died and rose for us...," in the words of Prayer D. The Holy Spirit mysteriously moves a person from autonomy and isolation, re-relating us to God. The Christian coach helps the client listen to the Spirit's voice, and keep in-step with the Spirit on the journey of transformation.

Before his departure, Jesus taught his friends to anticipate the relationship-restoring role of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised his friends that the Spirit would help them experience a new intimacy with God: "I will not leave you as orphans...On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you." "We will come and

make our home with him.”¹⁸⁹ The Apostle Paul described this phenomenon from a different angle in Romans 8:14-17. The Holy Spirit is given to Christians as “the Spirit of sonship” transforming alienation from the Creator into love with Father. The Holy Spirit is bearing witness within a person of their filial status, much as the Spirit did for Jesus at his baptism.¹⁹⁰ Paul compactly summarized this concept earlier in Romans, saying, “God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.”¹⁹¹ In reply, the Spirit inspires in Jesus’ followers the deepest, most sincere expression of intimacy with God: a child saying “Abba” to Yahweh as Father.¹⁹² As we have already seen, this intimacy is experienced within the “dance” of life in the Trinity.¹⁹³ The Spirit can be portrayed as the arms of love with which the Father and Son embrace each other. Since Pentecost, the arms of love are now reaching out to embrace Jesus’ people, drawing them into the divine dance.

The “Spirit of sonship” strikes at the roots of idolatry in human hearts. Since the fall, people are longing for the love that was lost when they were alienated from God. Idols, in all their variety, promise to satisfy that longing, but they always fall short. People do strange things when the desires of their heart are disappointed. But when

¹⁸⁹ Romans 14:18-23.

¹⁹⁰ Mark 14:36.

¹⁹¹ Romans 5:5.

¹⁹² Romans 8:15.

¹⁹³As envisioned by St. Augustine of Hippo, the Holy Spirit is the love between God the Father and God the Son. The Holy Spirit is thus love itself. Augustine went so far as to say that we can use “Love” as a proper name for the Holy Spirit. *On the Trinity*, Book XV, chapters 17-19.

reunited with God, people experience what Thomas Chalmers called, “the expulsive power of a greater affection.” The love of the Father is the ultimate soul satisfier, which frees people from the grip of idols. The Holy Spirit is thus reversing the mistrust and alienation of the Fall, working mysteriously in a believer, bearing inner witness of their filial status with God, restoring intimacy with God.

If the Holy Spirit is giving “supporting witness,”¹⁹⁴ each Christian needs to *learn to listen* to the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking in them. The Psalmist spoke of it, “I listen carefully to what God the LORD is saying, for he speaks peace to his faithful people.”¹⁹⁵ The Psalmist assumes that God’s speech is not limited to the Law and the Prophets, but overflows in ongoing conversation with those who will practice the art of listening. As we have previously seen, much of coaching is developing the discipline of listening. Here we learn to listen to God. Tony Stoltzfus has pioneered a helpful way for Christians to do that, by bringing prayer into the coaching conversation. The coach can “invite Jesus” to join the coaching conversation through the Holy Spirit, who is intimately present.¹⁹⁶ The coach may pause during the discussion and invite the client to pray. Instead of launching into an eloquent, passionate intercession, in which the person praying does most of the talking, the Christian coach can simply ask God what he wants to say to the client right then and there. Stoltzfus said:

¹⁹⁴ Wright, *Kingdom New Testament*, 323.

¹⁹⁵ Psalm 85:8, (New Living Translation).

¹⁹⁶ Matthew 18:20.

Most of us grew up learning to pray about the business of being a Christian. We ask for help to do the right thing, pray that our relatives will know God, or petition him to bless what we are doing for him. We ask forgiveness (at best) or grovel (at worst) about the things we do wrong, and return repeatedly for direction and confirmation so we're certain we know what we're supposed to do.¹⁹⁷

Stoltzfus shared his insight in *Questions for Jesus* about how he personally, “discovered how to talk to Jesus about the relationship instead of just the business.”¹⁹⁸ His paradigm for being in relationship with God changed when he realized that, though most people’s prayer time is spent asking God “What do you want me to do,” God is more interested in just being together. As a coach, Stoltzfus “was totally committed to not being a teller,” in his relationship with his clients. He realized, however, that in his prayer life, he had been trying “get God to be a teller for me.”¹⁹⁹ He came to the conclusion that God was much more interested in a conversational relationship centered in trust and intimacy, rather than giving advice about how to do his work. Instead of repetitively asking God, “What do you want me to do?” and waiting for a divine reply with the specifics, God’s reply, like a coach’s, is more likely to be “Let’s figure it out together.” God is like a parent fascinated at his child’s fascination in exploring and discovering the world around him. God is sharing with us the joy in the shared journey of discovery. We saw that in the Garden. God gave Adam and Eve a destiny of vast scope to fulfill, but said next to nothing about how to do it. Planning to work with them in partnership, God instead gave them intelligence and discretion in the endeavor,

¹⁹⁷ Stoltzfus, *Questions for Jesus*, 5.

¹⁹⁸ Stoltzfus, *Questions for Jesus*, 5.

¹⁹⁹ Stoltzfus, *Questions for Jesus*, 6.

saying in effect, “Let’s figure it out together.” That begins with ongoing intimacy and trust in God’s goodness “with us precisely in the details of day-to-day existence.”

God gave the Holy Spirit to restore the relationship between God and his people and to loosen the grip of habitual autonomy upon fallen human hearts.²⁰⁰ With intimacy recovered, human beings are able to turn again to living out their destiny, as Prayer D said, “to complete his work in the world and to bring to fulfillment the sanctification of all.” That was Paul’s point when he transitioned seamlessly from talking about the Spirit’s restoration of our relationship as “sons,” to portraying our destiny as “heirs.”²⁰¹ The “revealing of the sons of God”²⁰² is the emergence of Jesus’ people, stepping out to recover Adam’s role in the new creation Jesus is making. In that context, a Christian’s responsibility consists of the “obligation” to the Spirit to put to death the old age within them, and to work in the surrounding world to supplant the old age with the new.

The Holy Spirit is Revealing Our Destiny

As Jesus was preparing the disciples for his departure, he spoke in the Upper Room Discourse of their destiny to join him in doing “the works I do”²⁰³ to “bear much

²⁰⁰ The spirit has a mysterious way of making God’s agenda ours, by working within the human heart and moving our motivation, as Paul said in Phil 2:13: “God is at work within you both to will and to work for his perfect pleasure.”

²⁰¹ Romans 8:17.

²⁰² Romans 8:19 (ESV).

²⁰³ John 14:12.

fruit”²⁰⁴ so that “the world may know.”²⁰⁵ Their mission would be empowered by the coming of the Holy Spirit, who will “guide you into all truth” by “taking what is mine and making it known to you.”²⁰⁶ The Holy Spirit is God’s agent of revelation, taking what God knows and revealing it to his people so they can live fruitfully in the new creation in Christ.²⁰⁷ The Spirit is helping Jesus’ people grasp God’s loving intention for their lives. The Christian coach relies on this activity and seeks to work harmoniously with it, by asking questions that help the person get in touch with the Spirit’s work, not by presuming to give advice.

As we saw in the previous section, the Spirit reveals the filial *relationship* believers have with the Father. The Spirit also reveals a person’s filial *destiny*. Paul called it our “inheritance.” He said, “Now if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”²⁰⁸ Paul helped Christians see that, as co-heirs with the Messiah, their destiny is shared with Jesus, both in his glory and suffering. Let us look at each,

²⁰⁴ John 15:8. Paul used the same image of fruitfulness to describe the Holy Spirit’s work in a believer as “the fruit of the Spirit” in Galatians 5:22-23.

²⁰⁵ John 17:21.

²⁰⁶ John 16:13-14.

²⁰⁷ Paul explored this theme in 1 Corinthians 2:10-12, offering a glimpse the Spirit searching the deep things within God and revealing what he finds to Jesus’ people. When Paul says in v 11 that, “No one knows the heart of a man except the spirit of man that is in him,” he seems to assume a core principle of Christian Coaching: each person is the expert of their own life. As we saw in Proverbs 20:5, to know the inner life of a person one must search it out, taking an inquiring approach to discovering what’s inside. In the same way the Spirit is the expert of God’s inner life, searching God’s heart, drawing forth what is hidden there and revealing it to us; see Fee’s commentary on 1 Corinthians, page 100.

²⁰⁸ Romans 8:17.

starting with sharing in his glory. The *glory* of this inheritance is portrayed from bookend to bookend the Bible. In the Garden of Eden humans were given “the whole world” into their care. Though this was forfeited in the fall, God promised Abraham that his descendants would receive it again. The initial phase of that promise was life in the “promised land.” In Paul’s teaching, however, the scope of Abraham’s inheritance extended beyond the borders of the holy land to include “the world,”²⁰⁹ ultimately stretching to encompass everything, according to the promise that God will “freely give us *all things*.”²¹⁰ “All things” would seem to include everything which Adam lost and Jesus is regaining. Wright summarized it, writing, “It means that the whole world, the entire creation, is going to be made over to the Messiah and his people and with their eventual vindication and resurrection that entire creation will itself be set free from corruption and decay...It means that we will share in the Messiah’s glorious rule over the world.”²¹¹ Paul is clear, however, that glory is conditioned upon sharing in Messiah’s *sufferings*.

Paul is saying that Christians, like Israel and Jesus before them, aren’t saved *from* suffering, but are saved *through* it. In Romans 8:12-17, Paul likens the believer’s experience of struggle to Israel’s wilderness journey.²¹² On that long, hard pilgrimage God worked to transform his people from slaves, groaning under Pharaoh, into his

²⁰⁹ Romans 4:13.

²¹⁰ Romans 8:32.

²¹¹ Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Romans Part I* (Nashville, TN: WJKP, 2005), 147.

²¹² Wright, *Paul for Everyone*, 145, 152.

children, enjoying the real God and the glorious liberty of their inheritance in Canaan. Israel's many failures along the way demonstrated the need for Messiah to succeed where Israel had failed. Jesus' forty-day wilderness sojourn following his baptism was portrayed by the Gospel writers as fulfilling Israel's destiny. According to N.T. Wright, "Part of Jesus' role and vocation is precisely to make Israel's story complete: as 'son of God' he is, as it were, Israel-in-person, succeeding at last where Israel had failed."²¹³ Jesus also laid hold of his own destiny while struggling in the wilderness. The author of Hebrews said, "Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered..."²¹⁴ The parched desert of Judea was a crucible that shaped Jesus' character to fulfill his destiny as he struggled to obey and to discern the right way. He entered the wilderness a carpenter from Nazareth, and came out "in the power of the Spirit"²¹⁵ anointed and energized for his work as Messiah. As with Israel and Jesus, the Spirit refines believers through suffering, one step at a time through the parched places of failure and loss. He teaches people to hang on to hope in their inheritance in the face of the unknown. The little steps of trust and obedience a person takes every day in her relationships, habits and decisions shape her character, direct her path in life and determine her destiny. Christian coaching can help a person along this journey.

Christian coaches often deal with people at the point in the wilderness where their yearning and pain motivate them to seek change. The coach's aim is to facilitate

²¹³ N.T. Wright, *Matthew for Everyone* (Louisville, TN: WJKP, 2004), 15.

²¹⁴ Hebrews 5:8 (ESV).

²¹⁵ Luke 4:14.

their transformation by helping them: 1) make sense of their suffering, and 2) connect with God's presence along the way. Change starts here. First, coaching helps make sense of suffering, by helping a person apply Paul's promise that, "God makes all things work together for good for those that love God and are called according to his purposes." The Christian coach knows that suffering is not random and meaningless, but is the way the Spirit works to transform people into Jesus' likeness. Failure and loss are a "doorway into investigating the destructive habits, attitudes and beliefs and actions" that control their lives.²¹⁶ In coaching parlance it's called "learning from life." Coaching engages the "teachable moments" of life to produce lasting change. The coach can ask questions that help the client interpret God's purpose in their suffering:

If you knew God is involved in this circumstance, how would you look at it differently?

Referring to the experience of Israel and Jesus in the wilderness, the coach can ask "What do you think they felt in their long, painful journey?

What do you think they learned or changed in the wilderness?

What caused those changes?

What do you think God is trying to do in you through this?"

How do you see this suffering shaping you to fulfill God's call in your life?

The basic pattern that emerges in scripture's wilderness theme is that God's people recognize their idols, expose their emptiness, and transfer their trust from false gods to the living God. They discover the only things that will truly satisfy: intimacy with God

²¹⁶ Chad Hall, Bill Copper, and Kathryn McElveen, *Faith Coaching: A Conversational Approach to Helping Others Move Forward in Faith* (Hickory, NC: Coach Approach Ministries, 2009), 199.

and the destiny and responsibility that flow from it. With this perspective, the Christian coach encourages the client to depend on the presence of the Holy Spirit within.

Christian Coaching also helps a person *connect with the presence of the spirit*.

The presence of God sustained both Israel and Jesus in the wilderness, and does so for Christians as well. Christians live in the overlap of the ages, between the present evil age, which is passing away²¹⁷ and the new age that began with Messiah's resurrection.

In the overlap, Christians "groan" along with the world, still "subject to futility" and decay.²¹⁸ Paul described the Spirit's work in this setting, saying:

The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.²¹⁹

Because the Holy Spirit is within, also groaning and sighing, Christians suffer in hope, knowing God is at work to bring the new world into being. Paul likens suffering as the "birth pangs" of that world being born. The Holy Spirit connects us to the Father and Son in the very heart of our suffering and helps articulate our deepest need and desire to God. N.T. Wright has said:

Now we discover that God himself does not stand apart from the pain both of the world and of the church, but comes to dwell in the middle of it in the person and power of the spirit.... God hears and answers the prayer, which we only know as painful groanings, the tossings and turnings of an unquiet spirit ...we are

²¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 7:31.

²¹⁸ Romans 8:20, 22 (ESV).

²¹⁹ Romans 8:26-27.

caught up in the loving, groaning, redeeming dialogue between the father and the spirit.²²⁰

We explored that dialogue earlier in this chapter, using the image of the “divine dance.”

The love that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit share together overflows with infinite generosity to all God’s creatures, particularly humans made in God’s image. People were made for unbroken intimacy, trust and provision with God. The Psalmist articulated that promise:

I am the LORD your God,
who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.
Open your mouth wide and I will fill it.²²¹

Humans were made to be satisfied with God. But since the fall, people seek to satisfy their yearning for this divine fellowship by grasping after idols, which inevitably fail to satisfy. Most destructive human behaviors are tied to something yearned for, but not received. For Christians that unrequited yearning begins to be satisfied as we embrace the news that Jesus reconciled us to God, as we experience the work of the Holy Spirit drawing us back into the divine dance where our hearts can be truly filled once more. So now, in the midst of human groaning, Paul showed the Spirit sighing and groaning too, drawing Jesus’ people day-by-day back into the divine dance where our hearts can be filled once more from the divine wellsprings of love and purpose, which transforms human lives. As the Psalmist expressed, people can now bring their hungry hearts to God and be satisfied:

²²⁰ Wright, *Paul for Everyone*, 154-155.

²²¹ Psalm 81:10.

Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love,
so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.²²²

Stoltzfus said, “The repeated experience of being filled creates a fountain of life inside your heart that powerfully wells up to change your beliefs, your thoughts and eventually your behavior.”²²³ By connecting with the Spirit in the wilderness a person can thus experience the transformation God intends.

The Christian coach knows that “pain opens the heart up to change”²²⁴ and can help a person bring that pain into “redeeming dialogue” with God. We saw in the previous section how the Christian coach can help a person “learn to listen” to the Spirit speaking within and “invite Jesus” into the coaching conversation. Building on that experience of intimacy with God, the Christian can learn to identify and articulate their desires to Jesus and trust him to fill those desires in prayerful dialogue with God.²²⁵ Stoltzfus said, “The deep yearnings of the human heart were designed to be filled within relationship with God – not as a one-time thing, but in daily, experiential encounters” where he touches and satisfies a person’s deepest longing for intimacy and acceptance with God.²²⁶ To get there the Christian coach starts with the client’s presenting issue,

²²² Psalm 90:14.

²²³ Stoltzfus, *Invitation*, 11.

²²⁴ Tony Stoltzfus, unpublished notes taken during a webinar. The basic structure of his movement from situation, to feelings, to needs, to requests, clearly reflects Non-Violent Communication, as described by Tschannen-Moran in *Evocative Coaching* p. 96.

²²⁵ Stoltzfus, *Questions for Jesus*, 7.

²²⁶ Stoltzfus, *Invitation*, 11.

typically reflecting some pain or loss felt in the wilderness. The coach then asks the client to identify their response to that pain: “What did you do in response to the situation?”²²⁷ As the client describes his response, the coach then follows the thread further, by asking what Tony Stoltzfus called “the desire question”: What did that response give you? The Christian coach assumes a person has reasons for the thing he does. “You reacted that way because you believed it would give you something. What did you think it would give you?”²²⁸ These reactions to thwarted desire are the various devices, the God-substitutes people turn to in hopes of satisfying their desires. Once a person’s desire has been identified, as well as his devices, the coach can guide the client to turn to Jesus. As we saw in the previous section, the coach can invite Jesus into the dialogue, by asking the client to describe his desire to Jesus and then listening for Jesus to speak. Hearing Jesus isn’t hard. Stoltzfus wrote, “You just ask the question and see what wells up in your mind and heart in the next minute or two. It may be words, or an image, or just a sense of God present with you in a certain way. Then double-check if what you heard is consistent with the character of Jesus in scripture.”²²⁹ N.T. Wright spoke of the same experience in his commentary on Romans 8:17-17, referring to “the

²²⁷ If needed the coach can elaborate further by suggesting some different responses people often resort to: did you withdraw, fight back, try to get others to like you, etc.?

²²⁸ Since people rarely reflect on such matters the coach will often need to “drill down” patiently and repeatedly asking the desire question until the client is able to identify a basic, concrete desire. This question helps to distinguish between needs and strategies to meet needs

²²⁹ Stoltzfus, *Invitation*, 9.

coming together of the holy spirit (*sic*) with our own spirit” in the “redeeming dialogue.”

He said:

This is a delicate matter to describe. It is a common Christian experience that while many of the thoughts in our mind seem to come from the ordinary flow of consciousness within us sometimes we find other thoughts, which seem to come from somewhere else hinting gently but powerfully at God’s love, at our calling to holiness, a particular task to which we must give energy and attention.²³⁰ A key part of Christian discipleship is to recognize that voice and to nurture the facility of listening to it.²³¹

The Christian coach can use Stoltzfus’ method to “nurture the facility of listening” to the Holy Spirit. One of the biggest challenges a coach may face is the client’s skepticism about actually hearing Jesus’ communication. Many Christians have been taught to mistrust what they hear within their own heart. The coach can overcome this by creating an atmosphere of expectation in which a person can have a two-way conversation with Jesus. Stoltzfus’ approach is based in extensive experience:

I’ve coached hundreds of pastors, ministry leaders and everyday Christians about getting direction from God on the big decisions they face. When someone comes to me saying, “Help! I need to hear from God and I’m not getting anything!” it almost always takes less than 30 minutes to discover that God *has* already been speaking and they *are* hearing – they just didn’t have the confidence to believe that what they heard was really God. So be confident – you can do this. The hardest part of praying your desire is allowing yourself to believe that the still small voice you are already hearing is the voice of God.²³²

As a person learns to hear the voice of the Spirit and enter the dialogue, they experience their deepest desires being met, and habitual autonomy and self-reliance is

²³⁰ Please notice the three elements of relationship, destiny, responsibility.

²³¹ Wright, *Paul for Everyone*, 146.

²³² Wright, *Paul for Everyone*, 146.

gradually replaced by habitual intimacy with the Father. It changes a person's life.

Stoltzfus described the outcome, "When your Creator says you are beautiful, no one can tell you different. When the King of the Universe says you are okay, that's the final word. When the Son sets you free, you are free indeed."²³³ That is precisely the point Paul was making at the climax of his argument in Romans 8:

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ...No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.²³⁴

The Christian coach has the practical disciplines and skills to facilitate a person's up-close-and-personal encounter with "the love of God in Christ Jesus," in a practical and life-changing way. This leads to a renewed and clarified sense of *destiny* and empowered *responsibility* as people gain their liberty from enslaving idols to live as a child of God with a deep sense of Father's acceptance and purpose. This is how God "makes all things work together for good" through the suffering of the wilderness journey to achieve the glory of our destiny in Christ. The suffering in the wilderness in

²³³ Stoltzfus, *Questions for Jesus*, 9.

²³⁴ Romans 8:31-35, 37-39 (ESV).

Romans 8 corresponds to the “pruning” Jesus spoke of in the Upper Room that increases the fruitfulness Jesus promised in the upper room, as part of our destiny.²³⁵

The Spirit Is Empowering Us to Take Responsibility

When Jesus prepared his disciples for his departure in the Upper Room, he promised the Holy Spirit would bring them into a newly restored *relationship* with God. That same Spirit would also reveal and empower them for a *destiny* to “do the works I do”²³⁶ to “bear much fruit”²³⁷ so that “the world may know.”²³⁸ As with Adam, the mandate was broad, the directions scant, and the *responsibility* great. He told them simply to “abide”²³⁹ and “ask”.²⁴⁰ By abiding and asking, Jesus’ followers are to live consciously in the presence of Jesus day-to-day, minute-to-minute, and to freely ask, in his name, those things that will satisfy their hearts, please Jesus, and advance his work in the world. Christians are to share the conversational intimacy demonstrated in the previous section. These are the means of their inner transformation and the beginning of the transformation of the world. That was Jesus’ language of responsibility in John’s

²³⁵ John 15:1-2.

²³⁶ John 14:12.

²³⁷ John 15:8. Paul used the same image of fruitfulness to describe the Holy Spirit’s work in a believer as “the fruit of the Spirit” in Galatians 5:22-23.

²³⁸ John 17:21.

²³⁹ John 15:4-5.

²⁴⁰ John 15:7-8; *cf.* John 14:25-26.

Gospel.²⁴¹ It is clear that God's kingdom is ambitiously results-oriented, and where Jesus expects results he gives the means to achieve them. In the words of Prayer D, "He sent the Holy Spirit" to enable his people, "to live no longer for ourselves," and "to complete his work in the world and bring to fulfillment the sanctification of all." Christian coaching helps people take responsibility for bearing fruit, translating their restored relationship and destiny into action and results, for which they are accountable.

As we saw in Romans 8, Paul developed this language of responsibility by describing how "we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it."²⁴² The Holy Spirit is at work within us to free us from bondage to the old age, the "realm of the flesh" to live more and more into the new.²⁴³ This obligation includes the transformation of our inner world by cultivating personal holiness. Jesus' followers bear responsibility, as well, for advancing the new creation in the midst of the old one, which is passing away. N.T. Wright spoke of both in his commentary on Romans 8:26-30. Working toward personal holiness means "taking responsibility in the present for that part of the created order most obviously under our own control," particularly our own hearts and behavior. In the same way, he said we can understand prayer "as taking

²⁴¹ In the synoptic tradition, Jesus used a different language of responsibility, particularly in the parable of the talents. Jesus' followers were entrusted with responsibility over their own lives and also a small part of the world. These are a training ground for stewardship, anticipating the time when they will "inherit the earth" and be given control over everything else.

²⁴² Romans 8:12.

²⁴³ Wright, *Romans for Everyone*, 148.

responsibility for that larger world itself, in advance of the new creation.”²⁴⁴ So our responsibility in the new creation is two-fold. First, we are responsible for the transformation of our inner world, for which Jesus said, “Abide...and bear fruit.” Second, we are responsible for the transformation of the world around us, for which Jesus said, “Ask...and you will do greater works than I do.” We will look at each in turn and see how Christian coaching advances both.

Transformation Within

Prayer D defines our Spirit-empowered responsibility in negative terms: We are “to live no longer for ourselves....” Instead, the Christian is responsible to live “for him who died and rose for us,” because the Spirit is leading us into the new world God is making. Paul also stated Christian responsibility negatively: “We have an obligation, [but] not to the flesh....” Instead we owe a debt to the Spirit, to “put to death the misdeeds of the body,”²⁴⁵ because of our new filial relationship and destiny. “The flesh” here represents the human experience of the fall, the rebelliousness, corruptibility and idolatry that have come to be part of our nature. “Flesh” also envisions a “realm” in which human beings groan in bondage, like Israel in Egypt, as part of the corrupted creation. It is the “the old age” into which Jesus came to deliver us.²⁴⁶ The Spirit is inaugurating the new creation, which supplants the realm of the flesh, and shapes an

²⁴⁴ Wright, *Romans for Everyone*, 155.

²⁴⁵ Romans 12:13.

²⁴⁶ Romans 8:8-9.

identity and context in which Jesus' followers can now fulfill their "obligation." By the power of the Spirit they are empowered to live, in the words of Prayer D, "no longer for ourselves but for him who died and rose for us." This is the "mind governed by the Spirit," in Paul's language, which he fleshed out by using the image of the journey, with clear echoes from Israel's sojourn in Sinai.²⁴⁷ Like Israel, Jesus' followers are being "led by the Spirit of God"²⁴⁸ moving from hostility to surrender, life and peace. The Holy Spirit leads Jesus' people forward to claim their inheritance in the new creation, not to go back again into slavery in Egypt.²⁴⁹

In the same way, Christian coaching focuses on moving forward, learning from life as we endure suffering on the path to the glorious inheritance. Willard pictured the future outcome in personal terms. It is:

The total yielding of every part of our body to God, until the very tissues and muscles that make it up are inclined toward God and are vitalized in action by the powers of heaven, breaks all conformity with the worldly life in this age. It transforms us into conformity with the age to come by completing the renewal of our mind – our powers of thought, imagination, and judgment, which are so deeply rooted in our body.²⁵⁰

Willard helpfully described the specific steps of that journey by which a person's heart and life changes, step-by-step, through the influence of the Holy Spirit. This begins with *surrender*, in which a person accepts to God's authority as Father in all things. "We

²⁴⁷Romans 8:13-14.

²⁴⁸ Romans 8:14.

²⁴⁹ Romans 8:15.

²⁵⁰ Dallas, Willard, *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1999), 137.

recognize his supremacy intellectually, and we concede to it in practice – though we still may not like it, and parts of us may still resist it.”²⁵¹ This surrender then leads a person to *abandonment* into God’s loving care when a person learns to fully yield, embracing life’s ups-and-downs as part of God’s loving purpose. “We now accept these things as within God’s plan for good to those who love him and are living in his purposes.”²⁵² Beyond abandonment there is *contentment*, where “Dreary, foot-dragging surrender to God looks like a far-distant country...Grumbling and complaining are gone...not painstakingly resisted or eliminated but simply not considered.”²⁵³ Beyond contentment “lies intelligent, energetic *participation* in accomplishing God’s will in our world. We are no longer spectators but are caught up in a vivid and eternal drama in which we play an essential part. We embrace our imposed circumstances, no matter how tragic they seem, and act for the good in a power beyond ourselves. We take action to accomplish the will of God in his power carried along by the power of the divine drama within which we live actively engaged.”²⁵⁴

The Christian coach can help the client locate where they are in this journey of surrender. The coach can ask questions to help the client explore what next steps they

²⁵¹ Willard, *Hearing God*, 122.

²⁵² Willard, *Hearing God*, 122.

²⁵³ Willard, *Hearing God*, 123.

²⁵⁴ Willard, *Hearing God*, 124.

might take to deepen their surrender to God using various spiritual disciplines.²⁵⁵ As the client's relationship with God deepens, the coach can help the client take concrete steps to undertake "intelligent, energetic participation in accomplishing God's will in our world...." Collins said coaching, "is sensitive to the leading of the Spirit."²⁵⁶ The coach relies on the Spirit's work inside the client and consciously seeks to work in harmony with it, following the client's agenda where the Spirit leads. Christian coaching offers the *discipline* of trusting that that the Spirit is doing something. It offers the *skills* of asking and listening to discern what the Spirit is doing. It offers *perspective* to aid learning from life and joining the journey to get there. The coach serves as mid-wife of the new creation being birthed in each person. It begins on the inside, as a person learns to "live no longer for ourselves" and extends outward toward the "sanctification of all." It is interesting to note that same progression in Willard's steps from inner surrender, abandonment and energetic contentment to participation in accomplishing God's will in the world, which brings us to the second responsibility.

Transformation of the World

Prayer D shows the difference the Holy Spirit makes in believer's lives, enabling us to "live no longer for ourselves, but for him who died for us and rose again." In living for Jesus, Christians join in the work he is doing as the Last Adam, "to bring to fulfillment

²⁵⁵ In this regard, Christian coaching closely resembles the ancient discipline of Spiritual Direction; see Margaret Guenther, *Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1992).

²⁵⁶ Collins, *Christian Coaching*, 117.

the sanctification of all” in the new creation. In pursuit of that end Jesus gave his followers the responsibility “to love one another” and “bear much fruit” and to “ask of the Father” so we can “do mightier works than these” in the world so the “world will know.”²⁵⁷ Christian prayer and witness and work in the world are the means by which the Holy Spirit is working to “bring to fulfillment the sanctification of all.” N.T. Wright wrote, “Early Christians saw themselves as living in the first days of the beginning of the new creation that dawned when Jesus Christ emerged from the tomb on Easter morning. They saw themselves, in other words, as living within a story in which the decisive event had already occurred and now needed to be implemented.”²⁵⁸ The Holy Spirit is given to Jesus’ followers to empower that implementation. Wright said:

The point of the Holy Spirit is to enable those who follow Jesus to take into all the world the news that he is Lord, that he has won the victory over the forces of evil, that a new world has opened up and that we are to help make it happen...The Spirit is given so that we, ordinary mortals that we are, can ourselves be ...the means of God’s kingdom going forwards. The Spirit is given, in fact, so that the church can share in the life and continuing work of Jesus himself.²⁵⁹

The Holy Spirit accomplishes that implementation by knitting together and empowering “the Body of Christ.”²⁶⁰ When Jesus ascended to his place of rule over the cosmos, he

²⁵⁷ In the Synoptics, Jesus described this missionary work of “asking the Father” in terms different from John’s. In the Lord’s Prayer he asked his followers to pray thus to the Father: “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

²⁵⁸ Wright, William Orange Lecture, 10.

²⁵⁹ Wright, Fulcrum Conference Address, April 29, 2005, 2-3.

²⁶⁰ This was Paul’s most prominent image to describe the church, found in his letters to Rome (12:5) Corinth (12:12-27), Ephesus (3:6 and 5:23), and Colossae (1:18 and 24).

extended his presence into the church by the Holy Spirit. Through the church, he's now extending his presence outward into the world. The Church is the body of Christ, his hands and feet in the world, empowering us to live as "Jesus himself" in the world.

The Church, as a corporate entity, is nevertheless composed of countless individual people, each with a unique role to play.²⁶¹ Each person is a vital member and has an indispensable role to play. Day by day Jesus is living out his Lordship over creation through our decisions and actions. Teresa of Avila put it in intensely personal terms:

Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks with compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

The work of each Christian discerning their role in Christ's body was high on Paul's priority list in Romans 12. With bodies offered and minds renewed,²⁶² Paul urged Christians to figure out their role in the great work of the Body of Christ. He exhorted Christians, "Think of yourself with sober judgment,"²⁶³ taking responsibility to identify and, more importantly, to use his spiritual gifts.²⁶⁴ This is also high in the priorities of

²⁶¹ As we saw in our discussion of the Trinity, Christian faith balances both the corporate and individual. Paul makes an explicit case for both unity and plurality in 1 Corinthians 12, emphasizing both the Spirit inspired diversity of the Body as well as its Spirit-bound unity.

²⁶² Romans 12:1-2.

²⁶³ Romans 12:3.

²⁶⁴ Romans 12:4-8.

Christian coaching, as demonstrated already in this chapter. This priority is particularly clear in Stoltzfus' paradigm for discerning and fulfilling one's destiny, described in his *Christian Life Coaching Handbook*. His view of calling is that it is "an external calling from God for the sake of others."²⁶⁵ His book offers "a balanced, biblically-grounded approach to a Christians' life purpose,"²⁶⁶ by asking the client to explore seven questions:

1. Whose am I?
2. Who am I?
3. What has my life prepared me for?
4. Why do I desire *this*?
5. Where is the Master sending me?
6. When will this happen?
7. How will I get there?²⁶⁷

Questions two, three and four are of particular interest at this point because they approach, from different angles, the gifts of the Holy Spirit that fit each Christian for their unique work in the Body of Christ. "Who am I?" covers our individual design as God's creatures, "characteristics like personality type, gifts, strengths, and talents."²⁶⁸ Question three focuses on the prior preparation that shapes us for the work God calls us to, "the learned skills, work and life experience, character and self-understanding."²⁶⁹ Question

²⁶⁵ Tony Stoltzfus, *Christian Life Coaching Handbook: Calling and Destiny Discovery Tools for Christian Life Coaching* (Virginia Beach, VA: Coach 22, 2009), 7.

²⁶⁶ Stoltzfus, *Christian Life Coaching Handbook*, 8.

²⁶⁷ Stoltzfus, *Christian Life Coaching Handbook*, 50.

²⁶⁸ Stoltzfus, *Christian Life Coaching Handbook*, 51. See chapters five and six for full treatment.

²⁶⁹ Stoltzfus, *Christian Life Coaching Handbook*, 51. See chapters eleven and twelve for full treatment.

four explores the client's desire, passion and motivation, asking "Why is this important enough to give my life to?" It covers "dreams and desires, what energizes you, and your core values and beliefs."²⁷⁰ Stoltzfus offers a comprehensive theological approach to these aspects of a person's calling, as well as well-thought-out and tested tools for a coach to use helping others discern their place in the Body of Christ and their specific work to "bring to fulfillment the sanctification of all." N.T. Wright summarized it all beautifully, "Led by the Spirit we are to use our God-given creativity to find new ways forward...in the renewed human task," which is, "to be once more God's stewards over creation, the people through whom God will bring his world into its appointed and glorious order at last."²⁷¹

Section Summary

Before ascending to God's realm, Jesus promised in the upper room discourse to send the Holy Spirit, to "complete his work in the world and to bring to fulfillment the sanctification of all." The Spirit would draw believers into sharing a filial *relationship* with the Father. As their filial *destiny*, Christ's people are promised to inherit all things through the journey of life in this fallen-redeemed world. These form a *responsibility* for Jesus' followers to walk with the Spirit on the journey of transformation. This involves their own inner transformation, by putting to death the misdeeds of the body. This, in

²⁷⁰ Stoltzfus, *Christian Life Coaching Handbook*, 51. See chapters seven through ten for full treatment.

²⁷¹ Wright, Fulcrum Lecture 2005, 17.

turn, leads to the transformation of the world, by Christians discerning and acting on their unique Spirit-inspired charism for service in the Body of Christ.

The Christian coach can facilitate these transformations as a “fellow-laborer” with God the Holy Spirit. Gary Collins said, “people come for coaching because they want something to be different....”²⁷² People groan, longing to be better people in a better world. In that place of yearning the Spirit groans too, interceding for God to “make all things work together for good.”²⁷³ This is the Christian journey of transformation through suffering toward “glorification,” which Prayer D describes as “the sanctification of all.” We have seen how the discipline of Christian coaching helps both coach and client to “keep step with the Spirit” along the way by learning to: listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit within, make sense of suffering, connect with God’s presence to fill their heart’s desire, locate their progress and take the next step in the journey of transformation, and discern and employ their spiritual gifts in the Body of Christ to bring transformation to the world. The end result of the Spirit’s work is the transformation in people’s *relationships*, their sense of *destiny* and *responsibility* to serve in Jesus’ great work of bringing sanctification to all. Coaching empowers people to *see* things differently, to *do* things differently, and in the process, to *be* different. As Gary Collins said, “That transformation is the ultimate goal of coaching.”²⁷⁴

²⁷² Collins, *Christian Coaching*, 26.

²⁷³ Romans 8:28.

²⁷⁴ Collins, *Christian Coaching*, 127.

Chapter Summary

Though “coaching” *per se* is not explicitly biblical, this chapter has demonstrated that the principles and techniques of coaching are. Having surveyed the biblical narrative, using the Book of Common Prayer’s Eucharistic Prayer D as a summary, we have discovered the context within which “coaching” makes sense and have brought to the surface its principles and techniques from within the drama of creation, fall and redemption. In the first paragraph of Prayer D, we witnessed God the Father’s intention in creating humans for relationship, responsibility and destiny. When people fell into evil this intention was derailed, but in Israel God began the work of redemption. He made humans to enjoy *relationships* in community with him and each other, but in the Fall harmonious community became the assertion of autonomy. God pursued his people and began restoring them to relationship through the covenants and temple of Israel. From the Father’s action Christian coaches discover and have developed a relational framework for being ‘for’ others in a disciplined way. In Creation God also gave human beings a job to do to care for all creation, but in the Fall our *destiny* collapsed into idolatry. God nevertheless began the long work of restoring humanity, starting with Israel inheriting the land. From the Father’s action, Christian coaches have developed tools for helping people discern their destiny and make plans to fulfill it. In Creation God gave people discretion in how to fulfill their destiny, but in the Fall responsibility becomes denial and excuses. God however, pursued humanity, inviting the world to seek and find wisdom. Christian coaches have learned to embrace wisdom by taking inquiring approach to discovering the prudent path

forward. This was just the beginning of redemption. There was the promise of more to come.

Paragraph two of Prayer D tells the story of the work of Jesus, how he lived as one of us, proclaimed the message by asking questions, and died and rose from death to make the creation new. In the incarnation Jesus lived as one of us to restore human *relationships* by joining with people in the here-and-now of daily life. Following him, Christian coaches practice incarnational servant hood, being ‘with’ the individual client. God incarnate helped people see their *destiny* and live it out, like Peter. Following Jesus, the Christian coach helps the client envision the ideal future. In the incarnation Jesus accepted human limitations in order to honor human *responsibility*, empowering people to choose. Following him, Christian coaches take an “asking” not “telling” approach to keeping responsibility with the clients by asking him to translate the ideal future into SMART goals. In addition to becoming human, Jesus proclaimed the message of the coming Kingdom, but typically engaged people with questions. He asked questions to draw people into *relationship*, to incite *destiny*-oriented insight, and to stimulate *responsibility*. Following him, Christian coaches ask questions, using the coaching funnel, to hear the client, prompt them to explore their options, and to commit to a course of action. Lastly, Jesus began the New Creation, which transforms *relationship* in the ‘ecclesia,’ restores *destiny* as our “inheritance,” and renews *responsibility* by empowering clear thinking. Following him, Christian coaches learn to facilitate practical change like Paul in the “ministry of reconciliation,” giving hope and using destiny discovery tools, and helping each

person be transformed in their thinking. This was the work Jesus did, but there was more to come.

The third paragraph of Prayer D describes how the Holy Spirit brings Jesus' work into the daily experience of his people. The Spirit moved throughout history, but at Pentecost began bringing the world into the new Creation, changing our relationships, revealing our destiny, and empowering our responsibility. The Holy Spirit is changing our *relationships* by re-relating us with God. The Christian coach helps the client tune into the voice of the Holy Spirit using Stoltzfus' practice of prayer. This renewed relationship strikes at the roots of idolatry. The Spirit is also revealing the glory of our *destiny* to inherit the earth, while we suffer and "groan" with longing and hope. The Christian coach can help people make sense of their suffering and listen to the voice of the Spirit to fill their heart's desire. Lastly, God's Spirit is empowering human *responsibility* to bring transformation in ourselves and the world. Filled with the Spirit Christians now "have an obligation" not to "flesh" but to surrendering to the Jesus' Lordship for our inner transformation, and the unique role each person plays in the Body of Christ, implementing the new Creation Jesus is making. The Christian coach is equipped with the heart, mindset and tools to be a co-laborer with the Holy Spirit and the client in working toward these shared goals. We turn now to see what that looks like in practice.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

Building on the theological work of chapter two, this chapter will explore why Christian Coaching is effective in light of the research in four distinct fields: behavior change theory, Appreciative Inquiry, adult learning theory, and secular coaching methodologies. For each discipline, we will interact with one or more principal authors, and place them in conversation with one another, and with the work done thus far in chapter two. This chapter will describe their ideas and will then demonstrate how these ideas are incorporated into the discipline of Christian Coaching in general, and the sermon coaching course developed in chapter 4, in particular. An attempt will be made to resolve any challenges these authors present to the coaching thesis.

Behavior Change Theory

The field of behavior change theory has arisen in recent decades as part of public health awareness focusing on health conditions caused by risk behaviors such as problem drinking, over-eating, tobacco use, etc. The key question researchers and practitioners have asked is how to influence people to adopt and maintain healthy behaviors for themselves. Since Christian coaches are “change experts,” and Christian coaching is all about helping people change, this research is relevant to Christian Coaching in general, and to the Sermon Coaching Course developed in this thesis. For the purposes of this thesis project, we will focus on two influential books in the field of

behavior change theory. The first, *Changing for Good: A Revolutionary Six-Stage Program for Overcoming Bad Habits and Moving Your Life Positively Forward*, by James O. Prochaska, John C. Norcross, and Carlo C. DiClemente. The second is *Change or Die*, by Alan Deutschman.

Changing for Good seeks to understand the “underlying structure of change” by which people are able to significantly alter their behaviors, thoughts and feelings. They learned in the course of their research that “successful self-changing individuals follow a powerful, and perhaps most important, controllable and predictable course.”¹

Prochaska, Norcross and DiClemente take a “transstheoretical approach” – that is, they use the common components of the major therapeutic and psychological models² to analyze that course of change. They describe **six stages of change** through which people predictably progress through on the journey of transformation. These stages are:

1. Precontemplation. “People at this stage typically have no intention of changing their behavior, and typically deny having a problem. Although their families, friends, neighbors, doctors, or co-workers can see the problem quite clearly, the typical precontemplative can’t.”³ They resist change,

¹ James O. Prochaska, John C. Norcross, and Carlo C. DiClemente, *Changing for Good: A Revolutionary Six Stage Program for Overcoming Bad Habits and Moving Your Life Forward* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1994), 15.

² Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente, *Changing for Good*, 26; including Psychoanalytic, Humanistic/Existential, Gestalt/Experiential, Cognitive, and Behavioral models of human change.

³ Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente, *Changing for Good*, 40.

seeking to change the people around them. They are typically demoralized, avoiding attention to their problem because they believe the situation is hopeless. Pain often induces contemplation. This phase is not typically relevant to coaching, which deals with people already motivated to move forward. However, along the way, coaching may bring issues to the surface about which the client may still be in a precontemplative stage. In such situations, it may be helpful for the coach to note the issue and ask if the client would like to explore it more fully. Being aware of **consciousness-raising** techniques can be helpful to bring what is hidden into sight. In this stage, “helping relationships” are extremely important, particularly being a “non-judgmental presence” (“I am FOR you.”) is often effective in reducing the defensive reactions typical among precontemplatives.⁴

2. Contemplation. “People acknowledge they have a problem and begin to think seriously about solving it...[and] have indefinite plans to take action within the next six months or so.”⁵ They can see their destination, and maybe even have some ideas how to get there, but are not quite ready to go yet.

Their desire to change “exists simultaneously with an unwitting resistance to

⁴ Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente, *Changing for Good*, 95. Bob and Megan Tschannen-Moran describe the importance of empathy at this stage in “elevating readiness to change,” *Evocative Coaching*, 112.

⁵ Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente, *Changing for Good*, 42.

it.”⁶ For instance, some people, called “chronic contemplators,” might be inclined to “eternally substitute thinking for action.”⁷ Coaching can help a person learn to translate intention to action more consistently and the coaching method corresponds exactly with Prochaska, Norcross and DiClemente’s first step, to “ask the right questions,”⁸ seeking to elicit from the client a picture of the ideal future. After that the authors urge the changer to “define your own goals”⁹ observing that the more specific the goal the better. This approach corresponds with the coaching the client to form SMART goals. The authors then recommend the changer “collect the right data” and “learn your ABCs” which means “develop greater awareness of your problem behavior, to gain insight into how your thinking and feeling maintain the problem, and to begin to develop a personal conviction of the value of change.”¹⁰ The coaching funnel is designed to help a person analyze their behaviors and situation and explore options for addressing them.

3. Preparation. Here people are planning to take action within a specific and near-term timeframe and are discussing their plans with others. Though they appear ready for action there may still be some ambivalence holding them

⁶ Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente, *Changing for Good*, 110.

⁷ Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente, *Changing for Good*, 43.

⁸ Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente, *Changing for Good*, 120.

⁹ Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente, *Changing for Good*, 121.

¹⁰ Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente, *Changing for Good*, 127.

back. “They may still need to convince themselves that taking action is what’s best for them.”¹¹ It is also tempting for some people to cut this stage short by taking immediate action, without sufficient preparation, and set themselves up for discouragement when their initial burst of effort fails. Coaching can help both the ambivalence and the insufficient preparation. So much of the inertia in taking action is getting started with the planning. The Coaching Funnel is a very helpful tool for moving from many options to an actionable plan. This begins with evaluating the options that have been developed and narrowing them down into an actionable plan. Here’s where **commitment** comes in. Having gathered a list of at least five options the coach asks “what will you do?”

4. Action. This is the stage when people overtly change their behavior and their surroundings and other people begin to notice and respond to the changes. The danger during this period is to assume that action equals change. It is tempting after early successes for the person changing, and their support network, to reduce the effort needed to maintain the action necessary for real change.
5. Maintenance. Once a person has taken action to accomplish change there must be effort to consolidate the gains made and constant effort to prevent

¹¹ Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente, *Changing for Good*, 127.

lapses. “It is a critically important continuation that can last from as little as six months to as long as a lifetime.”¹²

6. Termination. This is the ultimate goal, where a person’s former addiction or problem no longer presents a temptation or threat. “In the termination stage, all of this holds true without any continuing effort on your part.”¹³ The goal of coaching is self-sufficiency for the client, equipped to maintain the behavior without the coach. Coaching provides an excellent personal, disciplined support structure to “share the journey” of change with a person over time that helps them in the Action, Maintenance and Termination stages of the change journey.

Prochaska et al observed that these stages are rarely experienced in a linear fashion, because relapses are very common. More often people progress through the stages of change in a spiral motion, falling back to previous stages and resuming forward motion. The authors note that, “Most successful self-changers go through the stages three or four times before they make it to the top and finally exit the cycle.”¹⁴ The coaching relationship and practice is invaluable to this process.

¹² Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente, *Changing for Good*, 45.

¹³ Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente, *Changing for Good*, 46.

¹⁴ Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente, *Changing for Good*, 48.

Stages of Change and appropriate Change Processes

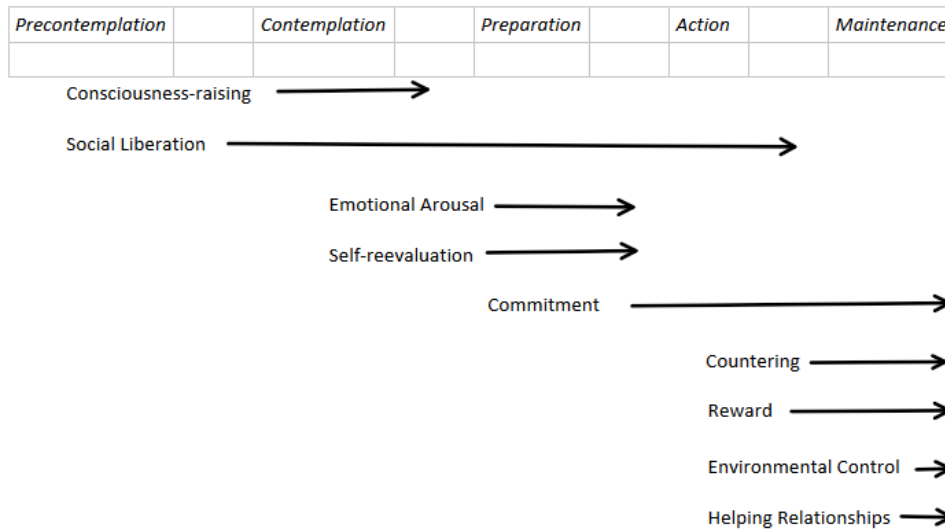


Figure 4. Stages of Change and Appropriate Change Processes

To help people make progress through these six stages of change Prochaska, Norcross and DiClemente have identified several **change processes** that can facilitate a person's transformation. They include:

1. **Consciousness-Raising.** This process enables a person to articulate their hidden thoughts and feelings, increase knowledge about themselves, their situation, or the nature of their problem. This is a very important part of coaching. Gary Collins recognized that the first step in coaching is getting in touch with reality.¹⁵ Coaching questions offer a great technique for doing so. It is particularly important, as the client moves toward commitment and action, for the coach to help them overcome their own defenses, resistance, and ambivalence toward change.¹⁶ The coach can ask, "What sort

¹⁵ See discussion of Collins in chapter one.

¹⁶ Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente, *Changing for Good*, 98. See how Tschannen-Moran do that later in this chapter in their discussion of lowering inertia.

of hesitation or resistance do you feel within yourself? What costs are you concerned about?”

2. Social liberation. This process involves finding or creating options and alternatives in the external environment that will support a person’s change effort. The coach can ask the pre-contemplative client what social forces are working in favor of the behavior they’d like to change.¹⁷ “Who in your life wants you to continue in your problem behavior?”¹⁸ As the client moves to contemplation and preparation it will be necessary to ask what resources they can identify within their environment that might make it easier to change.
3. Emotional arousal. This is consciousness-raising, but on a deeper level of feelings, facilitating an emotional experience that taps a person’s motivation and moves them to action. “Emotional energy is a powerful force”¹⁹ for overcoming internal and external resistance to change. Coaching helps a person to do this by taking time to imagine the ideal future in great detail, to reflect on the benefits of a certain course of action, and to “visualize the consequences of not changing.”²⁰ This imaginative work helps arouse the motivational juices by bringing the future into the present.

¹⁷ Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente, *Changing for Good*, 101.

¹⁸ Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente, *Changing for Good*, 104.

¹⁹ Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente, *Changing for Good*, 115.

²⁰ Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente, *Changing for Good*, 118.

4. Self-reevaluation. This is taking stock of the problem and “assessment of the kind of person you might be once you have conquered it.”²¹ It’s a chance for a person to see how their behaviors might conflict with their values, and to weigh the benefits of a course of action, as well as the price of not taking action.²² Coaching makes explicit use of reevaluation tools to maximize motivation in preparation for making a commitment to move forward. The coach is able to do this during the upper and lower funnel by asking questions that help a client analyze the reasons why they do what they do, create a new self-image and make a decision.²³
5. Commitment. Once a person chooses to change they must take responsibility for taking action to change. It often involves “going public” with the decision to change and being willing to make the tough choices. This involves confronting the anxieties one feels about change: the possibility of failure and the costs incurred in change. The authors recommend five techniques that can help counter anxiety: take small steps, set a date, go public, prepare for a major operation, and create your own plan of action.²⁴ These techniques are all included in the methodology of the Coaching Funnel.

²¹ Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente, *Changing for Good*, 29.

²² Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente, *Changing for Good*, 133.

²³ Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente, *Changing for Good*, 132-4.

²⁴ Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente, *Changing for Good*, 154-7.

6. Countering. Here a person replaces unhealthy internal responses with healthy ones, which support the new behaviors a person is taking action on. Countering techniques include active diversion, exercise, relaxation, counter-thinking, and assertiveness.²⁵ These would all be considered “options” in the coaching funnel methodology, with the exception of counter-thinking, which can be used at all stages of change. Since a person’s behavior often follows from an inner narrative or “self-talk”, a change in behavior patterns must be preceded by changes in the thought patterns that undergird them.²⁶ As a consciousness raising exercise the coach can ask a client struggling with a challenging problem, “What are you telling yourself about that?” Then coach and client can explore options for a new internal narrative that will counter the old self-talk that supported undesirable behaviors.
7. Environmental control. This is external countering, restructuring the environment to reduce the probability of falling back into problematic behaviors.²⁷ This can involve avoidance, cues, and reminders. These techniques are possible options in the coaching funnel methodology. A coach can invite reflection by asking the client about the role environmental factors might play in both the problematic behaviors and in possible solutions and new behaviors.

²⁵ Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente, *Changing for Good*, 177-83.

²⁶ Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente, *Changing for Good*, 180.

²⁷ Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente, *Changing for Good*, 187-9.

8. Rewards. Good behaviors and achievements are reinforced with positive responses like praise, a gift of something valued. In the coaching funnel planning rewards is another set of options worth exploring with the client as they plan to take action.
9. Helping relationships. Care and support and other forms of assistance are necessary for a person to successfully navigate the journey of change. As we saw in chapter 2, coaching is all about maintaining such relationships under the rubric “I am WITH you.”

Their studies on change have involved more than thirty thousand people.²⁸

Different combinations of these processes, applied at different times, are effective for different people trying to change. The key to a successful outcome is identifying the stage at which a person is, and “meeting their stage-specific needs.”²⁹ Timing is very important, and self-assessment is an important part of getting that timing right.³⁰

Prochaska, Norcross and DiClemente conclude that the vital ingredient is personal responsibility: “Individuals who believe they have the autonomy to change their lives are more likely to act successfully than those who are given limited choice.”³¹ That emphasis on personal responsibility is vital, and is seen as one reason why many

²⁸ Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente, *Changing for Good*, 57.

²⁹ Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente, *Changing for Good*, 58.

³⁰ Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente, *Changing for Good*, 64.

³¹ Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente, *Changing for Good*, 34.

psychotherapists don't see high rates of successful change. They often "gloss over their client's attempts to define problems in their own terms and instead use their own rationality to solve them... [because] they are inhibited by their theories from encouraging and aiding [the client] to draw on their own resources."³² This can erode a client's confidence in everyday methods of coping with difficulties.

Here is where the discipline of coaching shines. Compared to psychological methodologies, its theoretical framework is very simple and commonsense: trust the client to be the motivated expert of their own life. The praxis that flows from that is also simple: provide a relational framework and adaptable thought process that empower the client to define their own priorities, articulate their own goals, develop their own options, and commit to their own actions. Then share the journey with them as they take steps to change their behaviors and environment. The effect is the opposite of what Prochaska, Norcross and DiClemente observed in psychological disciplines. The coach is explicitly committed to helping the client "define problems in their own terms and use their own rationality to solve them" and "draw on their own resources." The coaching maxim, "Keep responsibility with the client" says it beautifully.

Prochaska, Norcross and DiClemente did path-breaking work in the realm of behavior change theory, and contribute much to the discipline of coaching. The value of this book to coaching includes: their trans-theoretical approach shares with coaching a

³² Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente, *Changing for Good*, 63.

desire to offer an alternative to traditional therapeutic approaches to practically aid people intent on behavior change, and their emphasis on personal responsibility is identical with coaching. Their stages of change provide practical, research-based insight into the steps people typically take on the journey of change. With these stages in mind, the coach can discern where a client is and can better tailor the coaching approach to the client. Furthermore, Prochaska et al. identify the “change processes” that aid people changing their behavior. They helpfully name, systematize and deeply root these tools in research, in a way that makes them more explicit and theoretically rich than in Stoltzfus’ Christian coaching system, which sometimes leaves them implicit or undeveloped. By associating each process with the stages within which they are most useful, they give the coach a practical guide to the use of those tools. Their research-based conclusions offer both useful tools for the Christian coach as well as a powerful confirmation of the coaching approach, and an explanation of why coaching works so well.

The second major contributor and popularizer of behavior change theory we are considering is Alan Deutschman and his book, *Change or Die*. Deutschman was curious about why upward of 90% of coronary bypass patients failed to meaningfully change their unhealthy lifestyle when presented by their doctors with the choice: “change or die.” His quest to understand why and how human beings change led him to explore and break new ground in “the psychology of change.” He offered his book *Change or Die*

to demonstrate that “people can change the deep-rooted patterns of how they think, feel, and act.”³³

The usual method of motivating change is to present “facts and fear” hoping the patient will take action to change their lifestyle. Facts and fear, however, often prove counter-productive, because they involve judgment and criticism, which generate defensiveness and resistance. The approach can also breed dependence on the expertise of others. In the case of heart patients, “Every aspect of the healing process reinforces the belief that you’re powerless and the doctors are all powerful...You’re entirely passive, while doctors are active.”³⁴ The predictable result is demoralization. “The common responses are depression and defeatism, or denial and defense.”

Instead of using facts and fear, Deutschman described three keys to change that are proven effective “when you’re stuck.” Relate: “You form a new, emotional relationship with a person or community that inspires and sustains hope.” This relationship has the power to “make you believe you have the ability to change.”³⁵ Repeat: “The new relationship helps you learn, practice, and master the new habits and skills that you’ll need...[so] new patterns of behavior become automatic.” Reframe: “The

³³ Alan Deutschman, *Change or Die: The Three Keys to Change at Work and in Life* (New York, NY: Regan/HarperCollins, 2007), 12.

³⁴ Deutschman, *Change or Die*, 32.

³⁵ Deutschman, *Change or Die*, 14.

new relationship helps you learn new ways of thinking about your situation and your life.”³⁶

Deutschman demonstrated the effectiveness of these three keys in three cases where groups of people were truly “stuck.” By applying the Three Keys people were able to experience significant lasting change. He began with a study conducted by Dr. Dean Ornish on behavior change in heart patients. Ornish supplemented the traditional doctor-patient relationship by gathering a team that included a trainer, chef, psychologist and other patients who are all striving to help each other. Their heart patients had much higher success changing their lifestyles. This community (Key #1) aided the patient to take steps of learning and training, trying new diets and exercise ideas and to deal with the emotional struggles in changing. Instead of brief appointments with the doctor, these regular group sessions created the context within which patients could “repeat” (Key #2) their new behaviors until they became habits. In the process the patients learned new ways of thinking and responding to their struggles. When patients can “reframe” (Key #3) their life and situation they are empowered to be active not passive. Deutschman noted, “Patients can take responsibility for their health rather than living irresponsibly. They can save themselves rather than counting on physicians to save them.”³⁷ That’s a whole new way of looking at life! The results were

³⁶ Deutschman, *Change or Die*, 15.

³⁷ Deutschman, *Change or Die*, 54

impressive. Participants in Ornish's program are documented to have had a 91% reduction in reported chest pains as a result of their changed lifestyle.³⁸

Next, Deutschman demonstrated how the Three Keys worked effectively with criminals enrolled in the Delancey Street rehabilitation program for chronically drug-addicted felons. Mimi Silbert, the founder of this program, assumed that drug-addicted felons suffer from profound demoralization that results from being alienated from the middle-class culture of American society. Her approach to overcoming this demoralization illustrates Deutschman's Three Keys. First, Delancey Street would create "a community culture based on old-fashioned American values."³⁹ That's Key #1. This community provided peer interactions and role-playing exercises to train criminals to think and feel and act like lawful citizens, by acting "as if" they were. By learning and practicing day after day (Key #2), to live without violence or substance abuse, and how to walk and talk and dress like middle-class citizens they are able to learn new ways of presenting themselves to the world. When a newcomer arrives at Delancey they are taught to "think of themselves as members of a large extended family in a tight-knit community of immigrants who help one another if they are going to learn the ways of their new country."⁴⁰ As participants gain the ability to "act as if" these things are true of them they are increasingly able to reframe (Key #3) their lives in terms of "the

³⁸ Deutschman, *Change or Die*, 55.

³⁹ Deutschman, *Change or Die*, 71.

⁴⁰ Deutschman, *Change or Die*, 75.

prosperous, peaceful bourgeoisie.” The results speak for themselves at Delancey Street where recidivism rates decline dramatically.

Deutschman’s third case study involved workers at the General Motors plant in Fremont, California. The plant was characterized by terrible labor relations and declining productivity and quality: “Workers were held accountable through a system of intimidation.”⁴¹ Then Toyota bought the plant and rehired the original employees, and sent them to Japan for on-the-job training in Toyota plants. “The Americans saw that Toyota trusted its workers...Toyota gave responsibility and accountability to its production workers, and the workers responded by acting responsibly and being accountable.”⁴² Toyota grouped employees in teams, led by peers, and gave them freedom to make their work more efficient. These new relationships between workers and with management was Key #1 to the transformation of the Fremont plant. With this new relationship came training in new habits and skills (Key #2). “Line workers, who’d never been allowed to make a move without a foreman’s approval under GM, now virtually controlled the pace of work.”⁴³ This new responsibility and freedom inspired fresh motivation and ingenuity. One of the key points of Toyota’s philosophy was “treating every employee as a manager,” which effectively reframed (Key #3) what work in a car factory could be like for its employees. The results were extraordinary. The Fremont plant was soon producing cars virtually without defect.

⁴¹ Deutschman, *Change or Die*, 104.

⁴² Deutschman, *Change or Die*, 106.

⁴³ Deutschman, *Change or Die*, 108.

Having proven that change is possible, even in the most hopeless cases, Deutschman offered a wealth of research and insight on *Changing Your Own Life*, which is relevant in many ways to Christian Coaching. He distilled numerous principles that apply the Three Keys, which we will now review, exploring ways Christian Coaching puts those into effect.

Relate

Deutschman concluded from his research that relationships are the most decisive element in facilitating change. He said, “The three keys to change suggest that the most important thing is the people, especially having a relationship with people who believe in you and whom you believe in as well.”⁴⁴ Deutschman gave such relationships far more explicit significance in approach than Prochaska et al did in theirs. For them, “helping relationships” are only one of nine “change processes.” It becomes clear, however, under close reading, that helping relationships provide the support necessary to implement the other eight processes of change. The discipline of coaching, as described in chapters one and two, stands with Deutschman in being fundamentally and emphatically committed to developing and leveraging the coach-client relationship to motivate and sustain change. To facilitate that relationship, the coaching discipline is built on the heart and mindset and skills of listening and other relational practices that deepen trust and intimacy and declare to the client I am “with” you and “for” you.

⁴⁴ Deutschman, *Change or Die*, 136.

Deutschman found this true in his own life. When describing an especially good French teacher, he sounded like he was describing a coach: “I felt he respected me, understood me, and believed in me, and those qualities inspired me to stick out the struggle and practice, learn, and master a skill that had eluded me.”⁴⁵ This is precisely what coaches are trained to do in a way uniquely tailored to each client. Deutschman observes that “Learning and change aren’t one-size-fits-all phenomenon.”⁴⁶ Perhaps, the most helpful thing about one-on-one coaching relationship is its flexibility. It is adaptable to each individual person’s needs and dreams and priorities.

Repeat

Deutschman described a process whereby a person, aided by supporting relationships, is able to learn and practice new skills and behaviors week after week and month after month. His approach places priority on action, with reflection following. New habits become the basis for new ways of thinking. This second key corresponds to the Action and Maintenance stages in *Changing for Good*. I think the discipline of coaching would generally differ from the clear priority Deutschman places on action to thinking. The coaching approach tends to interweave the processes of reframing and repeating, and if pushed, coaches would probably tend to prioritize changing mindset before changing action. For example, coaching provides the tools needed to help someone articulate their often-unstated values, dreams and priorities, and then to

⁴⁵ Deutschman, *Change or Die*, 130.

⁴⁶ Deutschman, *Change or Die*, 131.

translate them into clear goals and action steps. With the presence and support of the coaching relationship (relate) the client gets in the habit of thinking according to those priorities and goals, and then following through with action. The coach shares the journey of change with the client. “Short-term wins” (Psych Concept #3)⁴⁷ become momentum moving forward, which catalyzes further insight, excitement and accomplishment.

Reframe

Deutschman observed that people’s ability to change is “severely limited by their conceptual frames, their deeply rooted, below-the-surface belief systems.”⁴⁸ But with the encouragement of new relationships people are able to try and to repeat new skills, which make it possible for them to engage in new ways of thinking that sustain and deepen the changes already made. In the process, they learn to see themselves in different “frames” (which Deutschman calls Psych Concept #1) which help them overcome denial and other psychological self-defenses (Psych Concept #2), to recast one’s life’s story (Psych Concept #6), realizing that the “solution” might actually be the problem (Psych Concept #9). This new framework of thought deepens and sustains the changed behaviors adopted during the repeat stage of change.

If Prochaska is relatively weak in emphasizing the first two aspects of Deutschman’s system, there is rich correspondence with this third one, reframe, and

⁴⁷ Deutschman, *Change or Die*, 146.

⁴⁸ Deutschman, *Change or Die*, 151.

Prochaska's processes of change, particularly social liberation, emotional arousal, self-reevaluation, countering and environmental control. The core insight here is that change is an iterative process, a cycle that gradually circles upward in a spiral of progress. As we observed in chapter two, the biblical story is incredibly potent in the reframing process, potentially giving the client a different way of viewing everything in life. The coaching methodology operationalizes that potential in the ways described in chapter two and demonstrated in chapter 4. Suffice it to say the Christian coach has numerous tools available to help the client reframe their identity, assumptions, behaviors, and situation in the journey of change. That is equally true for the sermon coach working with preachers who wish to improve their preparation and delivery of sermons.

To summarize the usefulness of Deutschman's book to coaching, we would have to embrace his emphasis on the role relationships with other people play in facilitating change. He calls these people "change agents,"⁴⁹ and eloquently describes their principal role: "It's about inspiring hope - the belief and expectation that they can and will change their lives. They need you to believe in them, which encourages their own belief."⁵⁰ As for the difference of priority between Repeat and Reframe, it is really a difference in emphasis within an iterative process of the spiral of change. That gives the difference as much practical significance as the debate over the priority of the chicken or the egg. We move now from behavior change theory for individuals to the theory of

⁴⁹ Deutschman, *Change or Die*, 126.

⁵⁰ Deutschman, *Change or Die*, 155.

change for organizations in order to access one particularly relevant area of research, the discipline of Appreciative Inquiry.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI)

AI began as a research methodology for studying organizations that developed in the late 1980s by David Cooperrider and his colleagues at Case Western Reserve University. In the process, they observed that the very act of inquiring after the strengths and vitalities in the system changed it. Such inquiry had a transforming effect on the organization. AI gradually evolved into a change methodology comprised of five principles, which together have proven to generate positive actions and outcomes in organizations. Gervase Bushe, a major developer and proponent of AI theory said, “The theory’s central management insight is that teams, organizations and society evolve in whatever direction we collectively, passionately and persistently ask questions.”⁵¹ This highlights the power of questions to shape organizations. The basic idea is that by asking after and celebrating what is right, people are able to connect with their passion and to grow out of, or find energy to fix what’s wrong. Inquiry itself is action. Over the years AI practitioners have distilled several principles that undergird their approach, though they vary in number and order depending on the author, they are:

⁵¹ “The Appreciative Inquiry Model,” in E.H. Kressler, ed., *Encyclopedia of Management Theory* (Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2013), 1.

The Constructionist Principle

“What we believe to be true determines what we do and thought and action emerge from relationships.”⁵² Different systems and organizations have the power to create their own culture and their own reality by the character of their interactions. If “words create world,” our words and questions can often have the power of self-fulfilling prophecies, for good or ill. If our words evoke what isn’t working, then that is where people’s energy and effort will be focused and the results will reflect that negativity. But if our conversations focus on what is working well, we will begin to notice more of the best that life has to offer and the energy and effort focused in that direction will likely produce positive results. Our questions have the power to construct both realities.

The Simultaneity Principle

“Questions are never neutral, they are fateful, and social systems move in the direction of the questions they most persistently and passionately discuss.”⁵³ Cooperrider *et. al.* observed that positive questions not only orient the system to a positive future, they simultaneously create a positive present. People’s interactions in a system shift the instant a new question is asked. Asking “What’s wrong here?” tends to sap energy and lead to blame and defensiveness, while asking “What is going well

⁵² “Appreciative Inquiry Model,” 1.

⁵³ “Appreciative Inquiry Model,” 1.

here?” brings excitement and hope and provokes more positive interactions. This principle illustrates the fact that “asking is action.”

The Poetic Principle

Since “organizational life is expressed in the stories people tell each other every day...the words and topics chosen for inquiry have impact far beyond just the words themselves. They invoke sentiments, understandings, and worlds of meaning.”⁵⁴ So it is very important to give more attention to the positive dimensions of the present moment in order to stir a sense of appreciation and hope for the organization’s potential. We tend to get more of what we focus on.

The Anticipatory Principle

“What we do today is guided by our image of the future” which gives our actions the power to bring that future into the present.⁵⁵ Our questions and reflections grow from what we anticipate happening in the future. Fear about the future makes it difficult to see, much less celebrate the positive. That mindset tends to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. On the other hand, holding hopeful, positive thoughts of the future tends to tilt things in that direction. When we are able to imagine things at their very best we become energized in our present efforts to bring it to pass.

⁵⁴ “Appreciative Inquiry Model,” 1.

⁵⁵ “Appreciative Inquiry Model,” 1.

The Positive Principle

Positive relationships and emotions “like hope, excitement, inspiration, camaraderie and joy” result in positive action and change.⁵⁶ Cooperrider and his team observed that analysis of problems and failures and weaknesses seldom produces that kind of positive motion. At best, such analysis might result in fixing those problems. At worst, it can cause a downward spiral as people focus on what is wrong, assigning blame and stirring defensiveness. Instead, inquiring into strengths and passion encourages people to set aside their negative voices and to experiment with new ideas and new ways of doing things.

The approach defined in these principles differs substantially in emphasis from Prochaska, Norcross and DiClemente who place strong, primary focus on “problem behaviors.” Their basic process is overcoming the denial of difficult realities by moving through phases of pre-contemplation to contemplation, where the person begins to grapple with their problem and reflect on how to deal with those behaviors. The tools used to facilitate that movement have to do with altering one’s mind-set toward the problem behavior through consciousness-raising, emotional arousal, self-reevaluation, and countering. In this context, the focus of AI “celebrating the best of what is” might, itself, sound like a kind of denial and avoidance of the problem behavior. Having acknowledged that, however, it is necessary to point out that the disciplined focus on

⁵⁶ “Appreciative Inquiry Model,” 2.

the positive in the AI principles is, at base, an emotional arousal technique within the corporate environment, in the spirit of Process #3 in *Changing for Good*.

How do these principles align with coaching methodology? Christian Coaching has both the realism to deal frankly and fully with problem behaviors, and the hope to embrace the best of what is, and to practically imagine the best of what can be. The Christian coach has tools to begin where the client is and tailor an approach to the future that is appropriate to each client. Having said that, it's important to recognize that coaching can tend to be a largely "problem-solving" approach. AI's positive approach can be used to correct that tendency. It offers useful tools to enhance the positivity of the "I am FOR you" affirmation, and it also offers a rich conceptual vocabulary to enrich the coaching methodology for imagining a personal ideal future.

The AI principles above have been translated into a method, often called the "4D model," which identifies four phases of Appreciative Inquiry that guide participants in exploring a topic to be discussed (for example customer satisfaction, improving safety record, increased sales or production efficiency). The process begins with **Discovery**, during which participants discover the best of what is in the organization relevant to the object of inquiry by acting as interviewers and interviewees, each engaging in the act of inquiry. Telling and listening to each other's stories helps create engagement within the group, builds relationships, and produces a great deal of insight and creativity for engaging the topic being discussed.

The next step is to **Dream**, during which participants are given opportunities to imagine their organization functioning at its very best in relation to the topic being

discussed. As people share their dreams, common themes are identified and these shared aspirations are aggregated and represented in a suitable symbol that captures the dream in a compelling way. This dream then inspires the **Design** phase, when they develop concrete proposals for making the dream a reality. Participants group themselves around these different “provocative propositions” to turn them into designs for action, which leads to the final D: **Delivery**. Some AI proponents prefer to call this the Destiny phase where the design propositions developed in the prior phase are implemented in an improvisational and decentralized way by participants who make “self-chosen commitments to take action consistent with any design element.”⁵⁷ The role of leadership in the midst of this process is to support innovations and to create events and processes that “energize emergent and self-organizing change.”⁵⁸

The AI approach is essentially an exercise in reframing organizational struggles using techniques of emotional arousal to motivate positive relationships and interactions to foster change in an organization. The 4D process offers organizations ways of practicing empathy on a corporate level, of coworkers saying to themselves, “I am FOR you. I believe in you.” AI gives the theoretical and research-based evidence that demonstrates how using inquiry and affirmation can generate positive change in organizations. Principles developed through experience at the organizational level yield useful insight to the practice of coaching, particularly the theoretical understanding of what makes questions so powerful in stimulating change. It strongly validates the same

⁵⁷ “Appreciative Inquiry Model,” 4.

⁵⁸ “Appreciative Inquiry Model,” 4.

insights and practices that make coaching so effective on the individual level. We may note, in that connection, the similarity of the 4D model with Gary Collins' four step model of change which begins with Awareness of where we are now, then moves to Vision, imagining where we want to be, anticipating Obstacles that get in the way, and then moving to Strategy and Action.⁵⁹

There are, of course, differences between AI and coaching. AI practitioners, with their strong commitment to positive focus, would not want to risk draining away energy on identifying "obstacles," so they move directly to Collins' "strategy" in the Design phase and "action" through self-organizing Delivery. Another difference between coaching and AI is coaching approaches generally don't share AI's bias for "self-organizing" spontaneity and decentralization. Coaches can certainly operate in that mode, if the client requires it, but they will generally move toward specificity in goals and plans and accountability in implementing those in the journey of change. These differences aside however, we may say that Appreciative Inquiry is coaching for organizations.

Adult Learning Theory

One prominent theme that has emerged in our study of behavior change, and how to facilitate it with individuals and organizations, is the importance of "learning." Change is learning, learning to relate, reframe, respond and act differently in the midst

⁵⁹ See diagram on p. 19, chapter one. As we will see later in this chapter, Bob and Megan Tschannen-Moran have done helpful work integrating the corporate mindset and disciplines of AI into the one-on-one interactions associated with coaching.

of challenging situations. The process of learning is complex and has been subject to intensive study for much of the 20th century. We also saw the central role played by “helping relationships” to facilitate learning and change in others. Adult learning theory explores how to maximize the effectiveness of teachers in creating learning experiences. Though “coaching” and “teaching” are different roles, often taking place in very different contexts, adult learning theory has offered much that supports and enriches the work of coaching. We now turn to two authors whose books have had huge impact on learning theory and are of great relevance to Christian coaching and the Sermon Coaching Course developed in chapter four. The first is Malcom Knowles and his pioneering book, *The Adult Learner*. The second author is Raymond Wlodkowski and his book, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, which builds upon Knowles’ work by offering a comprehensive and detailed list of techniques to apply Knowles’ theory to adult learning situations.

Malcom Knowles is widely credited with generating a revolution in adult learning in the 1970s. The book used in the research for this project is the seventh edition of his classic work, *The Adult Learner*, updated and revised by two of his preeminent students, Elwood Holton and Richard Swanson. The core insight of Knowles’ work was that adults and children learn differently. He developed the distinction between the two by coining the term *andragogy*, for teaching adults as opposed to children. Having developed this distinction Knowles tried to understand what is unique about how adults learn and to articulate core principles that apply to all adult learning situations, then build more effective learning processes for adults. He defined learning as “the process of gaining

knowledge and expertise.”⁶⁰ In pursuit of that goal Knowles laid out six principles of adult learning, which highlight the ways andragogy is different from pedagogy.

1. The learners need to know in advance why this learning experience is important for their life, what it will cover, and how it will proceed. The learning facilitator will need to “make a case for the value of the learning in improving the effectiveness of the learner’s performance or the quality of their lives.”⁶¹ One effective tool for doing this is gap analysis, experiences where the learner can discover for themselves the gap between where they are now and where they want to be. The coaching methodology accomplishes this by drawing forth from learners what is most important to them, using an inquiring approach to enhance their sense of value. In the Sermon Coaching Course in chapter four, that gap analysis is performed in two ways: 1) Asking the preacher to state their values and desired outcomes in preaching, then exploring their challenges. 2) The congregational survey helps surface differences in the preacher’s self-perception and how the congregation experienced a sermon.
2. The self-concept of the learner as responsible and self-directing. Adults have a strong need for that self-concept to be recognized by others, and when it is not, adults tend to resist situations in which they perceive others imposing their will upon them. In learning situations, the facilitator must be wary of treating them

⁶⁰ Malcom S. Knowles, *The Adult Learner*, 7th ed. (Oxford, UK: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2011), 17.

⁶¹ Knowles, *The Adult Learner*, 63.

as children. Facilitators must “create learning experiences in which adults are helped to make the transition from dependent to self-directing learners.”⁶² This assumption is built into coaching: “You are the expert of your own life.” It is actualized every step of the way by the techniques employed by the coach to keep responsibility with the client, asking them to set the agenda for the whole course and each session, asking them to define and choose their options and to follow up in their actions.

3. The prior experience of the learner is the foundation of subsequent learning. Any new content the adult acquires in the learning experience will be built upon and assimilated with prior knowledge and experience. This means that “the richest resources for learning reside in the adult learners themselves. Hence, the emphasis in adult education is on experiential techniques that tap into the experience of the learners...instead of transmittal techniques.”⁶³ Two implications arise from this observation: 1) varied experiences requires that facilitators of adult learning take a more individualized approach to adult learners to more effectively build upon each one’s unique experiences. 2) “As we accumulate experience, we tend to develop mental habits, biases, and presuppositions that tend to cause us to close our minds to new ideas, fresh perceptions and alternative ways of thinking.”⁶⁴ Accordingly, facilitators need to

⁶² Knowles, *The Adult Learner*, 64.

⁶³ Knowles, *The Adult Learner*, 64.

⁶⁴ Knowles, *The Adult Learner*, 65.

discover ways to stimulate fresh perspectives for adult learners. Coaching accomplishes these diverse demands of honoring the prior experience of the client. The inquiring approach is able to draw upon the prior experiences of the learner, to completely individualize the learning experience to the client, and to open new perspectives and possibilities by asking powerful questions. The Sermon Coaching Course builds a solid foundation on this principle in the opening stage sessions by exploring the client's life story, values, outcomes and struggles with preaching and drawing forth and refining their goals.

4. The learner's readiness to learn. "Adults become ready to learn those things they need to know and be able to do in order to cope effectively with their real-life situations."⁶⁵ This has been found to be true especially in transitional stages of a person's life, or in other times of challenge or stress. Learning experiences must be timed to coincide with times of most relevance in the learner's life. Coaching fulfills this principle by working with clients who are already feeling the need to learn and change and are motivated to move forward. Coaching methodology seeks to stimulate the client's readiness to learn by using self-revelation techniques like exploring the gap between actual and desired performance, and emotion-arousing techniques like exploring in detail the ideal state the client envisions and the benefits of reaching it.

⁶⁵ Knowles, *The Adult Learner*, 65.

5. Orientation to learning. The adult learner's motivation to learn is typically focused on solving specific problems within their real-life context, rather than learning a "subject." The facilitator must clearly articulate the relevance of each learning experience to such situations in the learner's life. The Sermon Coaching Course is well geared to presenting a practical process that effectively addresses very specific challenges preachers often face. In the opening phase sessions, the coach is able to explore in detail the client's specific challenges and needs and to tailor the remainder of the course to effectively address them by articulating SMART goals, the developing and executing plans to achieve them.
6. The motivation to learn is intrinsic rather than extrinsic, and focused on personal payoff. The most potent motivators are internal pressures (the desire for increased job satisfaction, self-esteem, quality of life) rather than external pressures (peer pressure, the nagging or threats of a boss, etc.). "All normal adults are motivated to keep growing and developing, but this motivation is frequently blocked by such barriers as negative self-concept as a student, inaccessibility of opportunities or resources, time constraints, and programs that violate principles of adult learning."⁶⁶

Coaching depends almost entirely on intrinsic motivation, and has a number of emotion arousal tools available to honor and stimulate those inner motivations. In addition, coaching is adept at overcoming the barriers Knowles names. It's affirming

⁶⁶ Knowles, *The Adult Learner*, 67.

stance and responsibility-giving approach are experienced by many clients as “a breath of fresh air” and extremely invigorating for further learning.⁶⁷ Coaching also has the potential to overcome barriers of accessibility and time constraints as it can be made easily available over phone or Skype. In addition, it is a method of learning that is very time- and cost-efficient. In the Sermon Coach Course described in chapter four, comprising two one-hour session per month for approximately one year at \$50 per session, a preacher who invests roughly 20 hours and \$1000 dollars in time with a coach can significantly improve their preaching and develop the skills to carry their momentum forward into further learning and transformation. Compared to the price of tuition and the time involved in taking a three-hour course in preaching, that is a highly accessible and productive investment.

Knowles’ approach to learning was influenced by the theories of many others. Of those theorists Rogers, Tough and Dewey are the most relevant to the discipline of coaching. They each tried in their own way to define what makes for effective teaching. Most of what they said applies to coaching as well and thus validates and enriches the coaching approach. Knowles presented Carl Rogers as advocating not “teaching learners,” but rather the “facilitation of learning.” “The critical element in performing this role is the personal relationship between the facilitator and the learner.”⁶⁸ That relationship is dependent on the facilitator exercising three qualities, which align exactly with the character of a coach: genuineness, respect and trust, and empathetic listening.

⁶⁷ See comments from “David” in chapter five.

⁶⁸ Knowles, *The Adult Learner*, 84-87.

Rodgers developed ten guidelines for the facilitator of learning that also undergird the process of coaching. The facilitator (or coach) should:

1. Cultivate an initial atmosphere of trust and openness.
2. Draw out and clarify the purposes of the learner(s).
3. Rely on the motivation of the student to implement their purposes.
4. Gather and offer a wide range of resources for the learners to explore.
5. Be available to the learners to serve their goals in ways useful to them.
6. Be accepting of the content and attitudes that the learners express.
7. Accept a role as fellow-learner and participant with the learners.
8. Take the initiative in sharing thoughts and feelings with fellow learners.
9. Listen for signs of significance in what the participants share, empathetically.
10. Be honest about his or her own limitations.⁶⁹

Allen Tough is another theorist whose contributions to andragogy have much to offer the coaching discipline. He focused on the helping role of the teacher, whom he called “helper.” Ideally, the helper accepts and cares for the learner, regards the learner as an equal, and shows approval, support and encouragement. The helper has confidence in the learner’s ability as a self-planner and trusts his capacity to develop appropriate plans for learning. The ideal relationship between helper and learner is one of dialogue.⁷⁰ Tough integrated these characteristics into a very helpful conception of

⁶⁹ Knowles, *The Adult Learner*, 84-87.

⁷⁰ Knowles, *The Adult Learner*, 90.

the role of the androgogical teacher in the following table.⁷¹ Again, the conditions and principles track very well with the discipline of coaching. With the exception of principles 5, 10, 11, and possibly 13, each of the principles of teaching above undergirds or finds expression in the discipline of coaching. “Teaching” here is nearly synonymous with “coaching.”

Table 5. Learning and Teaching

Conditions of Learning	Principles of Teaching
The learners feel the need to learn	1. Expose them to new possibilities of self-fulfillment.
	2. Help each student clarify his own aspirations.
	3. Help students diagnose the gap between their aspiration and actual performance.
	4. Help students identify the price of those gaps.
Learning environment is comfortable, respectful and safe	5. Provide comfortable physical conditions.
	6. Accept student and respect feelings.
	7. Build relationship of mutual trust and helpfulness.
	8. Share your own feelings and thoughts as a co-learner engaged in mutual inquiry.
Learners own the goals of the learning experience.	9. Involve students in the process of formulating learning objective.
Learners take part in planning and operating the learning experience.	10. Share your thinking on options available in designing the learning experience.
	11. Help learners organize themselves to make the most of opportunities for shared learning.

⁷¹ Knowles, *The Adult Learner*, 91-93.

The learning process makes use of the experience of the learners.	12. Help learners access and use their own experiences as resources for learning.
	13. Present your own resources in a way that is appropriate to the experience level of the learners.
	14. Help the student apply and integrate new learning to their experience.
Learners have a sense of progress toward their goals.	15. Involve students in developing criteria for measuring progress toward learning objectives.
	16. Involve students in developing and applying self-evaluation.

Another educational theorist who significantly influenced andragogy, and who has major resonance with coaching, was John Dewey, particularly his advocacy of the “inquiry method.” He urged the teacher to “rarely tell” adult students what he thinks they ought to know, for that “deprives students of the excitement of doing their own finding and of the opportunity for increasing their power as learners.”⁷² Instead, the teacher should adopt inquiry “as his basic mode of discourse” because questions are like “instruments to open engaged minds to unsuspected possibilities.”⁷³ The teacher should spend more of his time “listening to students, than talking to, or at them.”⁷⁴ This approach helps an adult learner learn to depend on himself or herself as a thinker and makes the students the major content providers in their own learning. This forces the teacher to be an expert in the inductive method, asking questions that help students

⁷² Knowles, *The Adult Learner*, 98.

⁷³ Knowles, *The Adult Learner*, 98.

⁷⁴ Knowles, *The Adult Learner*, 100.

clarify a problem, and develop and implement their own solutions to it. Such a teacher “measures success in terms of behavioral changes in students.”⁷⁵ This language and conceptual framework is quite familiar within the discipline of Christian coaching.

Having surveyed the six principles Knowles developed to describe what makes effective adult learning it is clear that Christian coaching embodies these principles very effectively in a one-on-one learning environment. One could even go so far as to say that coaching methodology is perhaps the ultimate expression of the ideal andragogue, with the caveat that coaching is generally limited to one-on-one learning relationship. Knowles’ work thus strongly validates the coaching approach. In addition, a survey of the theoretical foundations of andragogy, in the seminal writings of Rogers, Tough, and Dewey describing the characteristics and skills of the ideal teacher further validates the coaching approach embodied in the Sermon Coaching course.

Knowles’ revolution in andragogy was largely propelled by his insights into what *motivates* adults to pursue learning. Many others have built on that foundation. Raymond Wlodkowski is one of Knowles’ more notable students. In his book, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, he set out to further analyze what motivates adults to learn. He developed a planning method so instructors can create learning experiences that will maximize the motivation of their students. Wlodkowski defined motivation as “the natural human process for directing energy to accomplish a goal.”⁷⁶ It binds emotion to

⁷⁵ Knowles, *The Adult Learner*, 100.

⁷⁶ Raymond J. Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn: A Comprehensive Guide for Teaching All Adults*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 2.

action and tends to focus attention, imagination and passion to pursue a valued purpose. Applied in the learning environment, motivation to learn is defined as “the tendency to find learning activities meaningful and worthwhile and to benefit from them.”⁷⁷

Wlodkowski is particularly interested to discover the biological processes at work in motivation to learn, exploring recent findings of neuroscience. For instance, when people learn, it makes connections between neurons. Through practice and repetition those connections are strengthened and new networks of neurons are formed over time, which represent that new learning. When they connect with existing networks, they build on and modify previous knowledge. These networks are a physical, biological entity within the learner’s brain that express themselves as deeply held beliefs and attitudes. This is why “old habits die hard.” It takes great effort, sustained practice and repetition to alter these neuronal networks and bring about real change. For that reason, effective adult learning will:

Find ways to connect and build on learner’s prior knowledge, to begin with what they already know and biologically assemble with them the new knowledge or skill by connecting the established networks and the new networks. A biological approach to learning requires us to find out what adult learners understand and can do, to see such information as a foundation and a map for what we design for the instructional process. The road to masterful teaching takes a compassionate route.⁷⁸

As we have seen in chapter two, that “compassionate route” is exactly what Christian coaching advocates. The coach doesn’t come in with his or her own agenda

⁷⁷ Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, 5.

⁷⁸ Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, 13.

and try to impose that curriculum on the learner, but instead embarks on a process of discovery, whereby the coach and client together explore the client's background, experience, values, hopes and dreams, and priorities.⁷⁹ The coach helps the client to build on those to take action to achieve goals they had been previously hindered from achieving.

In addition to his work on the biological processes of motivation to learn, Wlodkowski also explored the biological components of motivation. Assuming the theories of evolutionary biology, he argued that the brain evolved to ensure human survival, in which learning is a vitally important activity. We want to learn because learning means our survival. The sensations, emotions and thoughts that accompany the desire to learn comprise human "intrinsic motivation." It is often accompanied by a feeling of inherent curiosity, or interest, or satisfaction that motivates people to pursue learning, aside from extrinsic motivations like promotion opportunities, financial inducements or pressure from others. "When adults can see that what they are learning makes sense and is important according to their values and perspective, their motivation emerges." From this state Wlodkowski concluded that those who facilitate adult learning "need to create learning environments that access what biologically motivates adults from within."⁸⁰ This approach assumes that adults are already motivated to learn and that successful instructors will seek to understand the learner's

⁷⁹ This imperative undergirds the early sessions of the coaching course in chapter four.

⁸⁰ Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, 17.

intrinsic motivation. Once they discover the need they will affirm it and “engagingly develop it through the learning process.”⁸¹

Wlodkowski identified several characteristics and skills that help make an instructor effective to develop learning processes that engage the motivation of adult learners. He called them the five pillars:

1. Expertise. The instructor knows something beneficial to adults, knows it well, and is prepared to convey it with others through the instructional process. “Adults learners are demanding, and rightfully so.”⁸² They know what they want and are wondering, “Can you really help me?” The instructor must convince them that the answer is, “Yes.” In the coaching relationship, of course, expertise is viewed somewhat differently. The coach is not a subject-matter expert (like mentors or consultants or teachers are) but holds process expertise that guides the learner to access and develop their own expertise in their journey of development. Because coaches are freed from the demands of subject-matter expertise, they are able to confidently serve a wider variety of clients with very diverse backgrounds, values and aspirations.
2. Empathy. This is the power of understanding and compassion for the learner’s goals, perspectives, and expectations for what is being learned.

Using empathy, the instructor can tailor the course to be explicitly relevant

⁸¹ Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, 47.

⁸² Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, 51.

to the learners. As the course unfolds the empathetic instructor will continually consider and seek input from the learners, “a constant desire to know what our learners are living and experiencing with us.”⁸³ The primary skill necessary for empathy is listening. “It is the single most powerful transaction that occurs between us and another person that conveys our acceptance...When we *listen for understanding*, learners are more likely to feel understood and respected,”⁸⁴ and that puts them in a good frame of mind for learning. Coaching is, of course, deeply committed to the heart of empathy and the skill of listening, as we saw in chapter 2. The one-on-one relationship with the client is the perfect arena for the exploration and discovery described in Proverbs 25:20.

3. Enthusiasm. When an instructor cares about the topic, both personally and for the learners, that instructor will likely be expressive about it, communicating emotions through voice inflection, facial expression, gestures, and movement. This stimulates learners to share in the enthusiasm.⁸⁵ Though most coaching is conducted by telephone or Skype, which filter out much non-verbal communication, the coach still has

⁸³ Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, 67.

⁸⁴ Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, 67.

⁸⁵ Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, 70.

opportunities to express enthusiasm for the client and what the client is learning and doing.

4. Clarity. “People seldom learn what they cannot understand.”⁸⁶ Clarity is the bridge that the instructor builds from his knowledge to the prior knowledge of the learners so that “information rapidly moves into and connects with the stored memories of the learners.”⁸⁷ This requires that the instructor plan and conduct instruction so learners can follow and understand. Since coaches typically are not providing didactic content for their clients, the clarity the client needs concerns the coach’s role and the nature of the coaching process. That is one of the purposes of the early sessions of the sermon coaching course. Clarity is also of critical importance for the coach in crafting what Tony Stoltzfus called “powerful questions.” The more clear, concrete, simple and open a question is the more effective it will be in engaging a deeper relationship, provoking insight, and stimulating ownership.⁸⁸

5. Cultural responsiveness. It is very important that the instructor show respect to all learners and thereby create a safe, inclusive learning environment.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, 79.

⁸⁷ Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, 79.

⁸⁸ We saw how Jesus asked questions to accomplish those ends in chapter two.

⁸⁹ Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, 84.

Coaching accomplishes this by conveying, in the concrete ways described in chapter two, that the coach is “with” and “for” the client.

This final characteristic of effective instructors is also the first of four Essential Motivational Conditions Wlodkowski has defined. “Establishing Inclusion Among Adults” is fostering positive attitudes, enhancing meaning, and engendering competence. These four conditions become the titles for the remain four chapters of his book. In each chapter, he offered a number of specific motivational strategies (sixty in all) for the instructor to use to motivate adult learners. Many of these strategies are relevant to coaching in general and the sermon coaching course in particular. I will summarize those strategies here, noting their relevance to coaching. The eighteen strategies that lack relevance to the coaching discipline are not included below. Wlodkowski defines a motivational strategy as “a deliberate teacher action or instructional process that is likely to enhance motivation to learn among adults.”⁹⁰

Condition 1: Establish Inclusion among Adult Learners

Consider using different font for coaching comments. And maybe even differentiate sermon coaching. As we saw in the section on change theory, relationships are a critical ingredient in human transformation. The same is true in adult learning theory. Wlodkowski said, “Teaching or training begins with relationships, relationships

⁹⁰ Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, 135.

of respect...intrinsic motivation is more likely to emerge because learners can voice the things that matter to them.”⁹¹ The following strategies were offered:

1. Allow for introductions. This provides a start to relationship the all-important relationship. Combined with strategies two and four, this describes the opening session of the coaching course.
2. Provide an opportunity for multidimensional sharing, which gives participants a chance to share more of themselves.
3. Concretely indicate your cooperative intentions to help adults learn. In coaching parlance: “I am for you and with you.”
4. Share something of value with your adult learners. It could be humorous or a personal story relevant to the topic helps build rapport.
5. Use collaborative and cooperative learning. This means the learners do as much or more talking as the instructor about the exploration and interpretation of course material. Coaching facilitates the client to do most of the talking.
6. Clearly identify the learning objectives and goals for instruction. This is part of the process of coaching. The Sermon Coaching Course accomplishes this at the outset with the learning contract and, later on, in defining goals.

⁹¹ Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, 126-127.

7. Emphasize the human purpose of what is being learned and its relationship to the learners' personal lives and current situation. Coaching empowers the client to do this for themselves.
8. Assess learners' current expectations, needs, goals, and previous experiences as it relates to your course. This is part of the process of coaching. The opening phase sessions of the Sermon Coaching Course are particularly designed to do this.
9. Explicitly introduce important norms and participation guidelines. This part of the process begins with the introductory letter and Coaching Contract, and continues in opening sessions.
10. When giving mandatory assignments or requirements, give your rationale for them. Though the coaching course imposes little that is mandatory, it is important to handle the congregational survey in the Sermon Coaching Course with care.
11. Acknowledge different ways of knowing, languages, levels of knowledge or skill among learners. Coaching adapts to each learner.

Condition 2: Help Adults Develop Positive Attitudes toward Learning

"In general, it is probably best not to try to talk adults into learning."⁹² Instead an instructor must bring forth the motivation in the learner by establishing a positive

⁹² Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, 172.

attitude toward the instructor, and create relevant learning experiences. The following strategies are offered to help do that:⁹³

1. Eliminate or minimize any negative conditions that surround the subject.

Early in the sermon coaching course the client will typically identify significant negatives they perceive in relation to their preaching. It is important for the coach to address those in positive terms, helping the client turn them into goals, and convey a sense of confidence to address them.
2. Positively confront the erroneous beliefs, expectations, and assumptions that may underlie a negative attitude. The coach can do this by listening for and exploring “signs of significance.”
3. Use assisted learning to scaffold complex learning. Coaching is assisted learning that uses well-crafted questions to “scaffold” the client’s learning experience, encouraging their self-efficacy.
4. Promote learner’s personal control of learning. Coaching yields to the client complete control of how, what and when the client learns. This ownership stimulates motivation to learn.
5. Help learners effectively attribute success to their capability, effort and knowledge. The coach can fully attribute all success (and failure!) to the client because of strategy 16. When success is often attributed, the experience of “small wins” can generate much motivation and momentum.

⁹³ Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, 136-169.

6. Use relevant models to demonstrate expected learning. Though not typically available in coaching scenarios, this strategy was helpful in the case of “Mark” in chapter five.
7. Encourage the learners. The coach conveys “I am *for* you,” by showing respect and trust for the client, expectancy and confidence that the client can learn and change, recognition for effort and accomplishment, and learning from mistakes.
8. Use goal-setting methods. The sermon coaching course uses the S.M.A.R.T. goal process.
9. Use learning contracts. In addition to the learning contract that provides a basis for the sermon coaching course,⁹⁴ the coaching funnel helps translate goals into plans that become an implicit learning contract.
10. Make the learning activity an irresistible invitation to learn. Make it safe, successful, interesting, personally-endorsed, personally-relevant (SSIPP).
11. Use the KWL strategy to introduce new topics and concepts. First, ask what the learners Know, then ask what they Want to learn, and at the end, asking what they have Learned. This structure establishes a baseline of prior knowledge which informs the instructor and stimulates the learner. It then asks the learner to develop learning goals, and after the learning activity asks

⁹⁴ See Appendix C.

the learners to self-assess their learning. That structure neatly corresponds to the outline of the Sermon Coaching Course.

Condition 3: Enhancing Meaning in Learning Activities

This is a matter of gaining and keeping learners' attention and interest in the learning experience. The following strategies:⁹⁵

1. Provide frequent response opportunities to all learners on an equitable basis. Interaction with the instructor is an incentive to paying attention. Coaching is all interaction.
2. Help learners realize their accountability for what they are learning. The fact that the coach will "share the journey" with the client builds in that accountability.
3. Relate learning to individual interests, concerns and values. The coach has learned a great deal about the client from MBTI, the opening life-story exercise, and discussion of the client's values and preparation process. This information becomes material for making such connections while coaching.
4. Clearly state or demonstrate the benefits that will result from the learning activity. The coach can enhance motivation by asking the client to pause and articulate the benefits that might accrue from a particular course of action.
5. Use humor liberally and frequently.

⁹⁵ Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, 235-307.

6. Selectively induce parapatetic emotions. Excellent speakers often use stories, anecdotes and quotations to elicit parapatetic emotions to act as “hooks” to engage attention. The coach can use such to affirm, or reinforce an insight or choice, or encourage the client.
7. Selectively use examples, analogies, metaphors and stories. For coaches, same as #36.
8. Use critical questions to stimulate engaging and challenging reflection and discussion. Such questioning “fosters discussions that are exploratory, unpredictable, risky, and exciting.”⁹⁶ Critical questions are generative, causing us to reflect on our own information and experience and to transform what we know into new meanings...such cognitive processing connects new ideas for the learners and links them in different ways to what they already know.”⁹⁷ That point is key for coaching, which assumes that the client has the resources to solve their own problems and achieve their own goals and questions can be used to help them draw upon those resources, look at their situation from different perspectives and articulate what is assumed.
9. Use case study methods to enhance meaning. Of the many methods discussed for this strategy, “Adaptive Decision Making” seemed most relevant to coaching. Wlodkowski defines this as, “Real-life situations that

⁹⁶ Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, 270.

⁹⁷ Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, 271.

are dynamic and have no clear 'correct' answer ...[where] we can only learn and retain new knowledge for them by doing...We have to interpret the situation while it is happening and choose from a number of possible actions.”⁹⁸ This very accurately describes the dominant learning methodology of coaching, in which the client defines goals within real-life situations and then begins evaluating options and making choices to alter their situation, taking action and reflecting upon the results. It is a highly dynamic, iterative process that, when practiced over time is a very effective means of learning and change.

10. Use role playing to embody meaning and new learning within a more realistic dynamic context. Though useful in many coaching scenarios, particularly where the client is preparing for a discussion, this technique's facility is not as evident in the Sermon Coaching Course.

Condition 4: Engendering Competence among Adult Learners

People have an intrinsic desire to be competent in what they value. As we have seen, that assumption lies at the base of andragogy, and is closely tied to the adult motivation to be self-directed learners. The following strategies “create a holistic system in which the competence and the self-direction of adult learners mutually enhance each other.”⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, 292.

⁹⁹ Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, 314-376.

1. Provide effective feedback. “Feedback is probably the most powerful communication that instructors and peers can regularly use to affect learners’ competence.”¹⁰⁰ Wlodkowski defines the traits of effective feedback, many of which are useful in coaching. It helps learners compare their work against a standard. In coaching that standard is the goals the client sets. Coaching emphasizes a dimension of feedback that is mentioned only in passing by Wlodkowski: “the more that adult learners can confidently self-assess and self-adjust, the more intrinsically motivated they will be.”¹⁰¹ Part of the genius of coaching is how effective it is in getting learners to self-assess.
2. Use authentic performance tasks to deepen new learning and help learners proficiently apply this learning to their real lives. The Sermon Coaching Course is almost entirely composed of such performance tasks, which, as chapter 5 will demonstrate, is partly why it is so effective. The client is learning while doing and doing while learning, which generates enormous motivation and momentum.
3. Provide opportunities for adults to demonstrate their learning in ways that reflect their strengths and multiple sources of learning. The Sermon Coaching Course does that by providing three ways of measuring progress:

¹⁰⁰ Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, 315.

¹⁰¹ Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, 317.

comparing goals to results, use of the congregational survey, and an exit interview which serves as a self-evaluation tool.

4. Use self-assessment methods to improve learning and to provide learners with the opportunity to construct relevant insights and connections. These methods include use of journals, post-write reflections, summarizing questions, and critical incident questionnaires. The Sermon Coaching Course utilizes opportunities for post-write reflections in which clients are frequently given the opportunity to analyze the sermon they just preached, summarizing the decisions they made in preparation, the successes and challenges they experienced.¹⁰² The exit interview at the end of the course is a good example of the closure technique of “summarizing question” which enable clients to reflect on the entire course.¹⁰³
5. Foster the intention and capacity to transfer learning. Because adults who begin learning with the intention to transfer what they learn to their real-world work are more motivated, instructors must foster that intention. In most cases, coaching clients approach the coach with that intention already in place. Coaches can, however, help the client deepen and clarify that intention by asking the client to envision and describe in detail ideal outcomes, and to extrapolate current insights to future applications.

¹⁰² Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, 347.

¹⁰³ Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, 349.

Wlodkowski specifically names “coaching” and “peer coaching” methodologies as ideally suited to this work.¹⁰⁴

6. When necessary, use constructive criticism. This emphasizes errors and deficiencies in learning, but unlike ordinary criticism, it does not connote disapproval, disgust, or rejection. When promptly offered based on specific behaviors and performance criteria it provides “efficient opportunities for improvement.”¹⁰⁵ In most situations the coach asks the client to self-assess, and with good reason. When done over the phone, the coach must rely on the client’s description of the situation and isn’t able to provide independent criticism. In situations where the coach is able to confidently develop such judgment of the client’s performance and does not feel that time allows for patiently developing the client’s self-assessment, the coach may ask if the client would find constructive criticism helpful.
7. Effectively praise and reward learning. Such praise must be “3-S and 3-P”: Sincere, Specific, Sufficient, Properly attributed for genuinely Praiseworthy behavior and in a manner Preferred by the learner.¹⁰⁶ This acronym is very helpful for the coach trying to demonstrate “I am *for* you.”
8. Use incentives to develop and maintain adult motivation in learning activities that are initially unappealing but personally valued. This is particularly

¹⁰⁴ Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, 357-359.

¹⁰⁵ Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, 364.

¹⁰⁶ Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, 368.

helpful in the Sermon Coaching Course in the process of “coaching to the survey,” preparing the client to overcome the difficulties of conducting the congregational survey.

9. When learning has natural consequences help learners to be aware of them and of their impact. The sooner an instructor can make learners aware of the impact of their learning the better. In coaching parlance this is called “small wins.”
10. Provide positive closure at the end of significant units of learning. These transitions may be marked with celebrations, acknowledgements and sharing. The Sermon Coaching Course offers such opportunities at the end of the opening phase by celebrating the completion of a client’s goals, at the beginning of the final phase by celebrating the client’s achievements, and at the conclusion of the course sharing and acknowledging what coach and client have experienced together.

In this section on Adult Learning Theory, we have learned to view the teacher in that relational role that figured so prominently in Change Theory. Knowles gave the pioneering philosophical basis for that role as well as some principles that describe what makes it effective. Wlodkowski then rooted those principles in the physiology of motivation and offered dozens of research-based strategies that enable the facilitator of change and learning (whether “teacher” or “coach”) to stimulate that motivation in others. Based on this cursory review of these teaching strategies, we observe that coaching employs some forty-two of them (or 2/3). At nearly every turn, coaching

methodology has been vindicated and enriched by the work of Knowles and Wlodkowski. It is striking that coaches are able to do this without “teaching” at all in any formal, classroom sort of way. Coaches merely facilitate the learning and growth in the client using tools and techniques that are strongly validated and enriched by Wlodkowski’s strategies. Hall, Copper, McElveen observed that:

Coaching is a customized learning and development approach, one that makes didactic and procedural approaches look like off-the-rack suits compared to the beautifully hand-tailored ones...People who are committed to development tend to prefer coaching over classroom, or training approaches because coaching is able to address the precise needs of individuals much more effectively.¹⁰⁷

Having located coaching within the matrix of Behavior Change Theory and Adult Learning Theory, and gleaned helpful insights that validate the discipline of Christian coaching, it is time to bring the discussion closer to home. We will now explore secular coaching methodology to discover variances and intersections with the distinctives of Christian coaching.

Secular Coaching

Christian coaching is a distinct subgrouping within the wider professional coaching movement. There are massive areas of overlapping values and techniques, but as chapter two demonstrated, those values and techniques are ultimately rooted in the distinctive Christian view of human destiny and responsibility in relationship with God and one another. Though “coaching” is a widespread secular discipline, with an

¹⁰⁷ Chad, Copper, and McElveen, *Faith Coaching*, 35.

impressive record of success in its own right, Christian coaching has the theoretical foundation to account for the effectiveness of coaching methodology. The Biblical account of where we came from, what we are made for, what is wrong with us, and how it can be fixed has explanatory power that accounts for the effectiveness of coaching, as compared to the contemporary secular world views which elevate human will and choice in a universe free of norms.

That said, secular coaching methodology offers much insight that validates and enriches the Sermon Coaching Course developed in this thesis. As an example, I have selected the coaching systems developed by Bob and Megan Tschannen-Moran in their book *Evocative Coaching: Transforming Schools One Conversation at a Time*. Oriented toward the professional development of teachers and aimed at the transformation of schools, their system is similar in focus to the Sermon Coaching Course. Both systems are tailored to the personal and skill development of people in the helping professions, teachers and clergy respectively. Both systems are ultimately aimed at the transformation of their institutions, schools and churches, respectively.

Tschannen-Moran wrote their book to “assist teachers to reinvigorate their teaching practices so that students can flourish.” Its lessons apply to preachers as well, so in the quotes and descriptions that follow, references to “teachers” can also be read as applying to preachers. Tschannen-Moran show how to create “relationships that foster and support the ongoing learning” of teachers by “increasing their trust, self-efficacy, motivation, appreciation, resourcefulness, and engagement,” using coaching methodology. Old approaches of “telling and selling” teachers on how to do things

better in the classroom have proven to demotivate, rather than motivate change.¹⁰⁸ A coaching approach builds explicitly on adult learning theory and “growth-fostering psychologies” associated with behavior change theory, reviewed earlier in this chapter, and seeks to motivate and not provoke resistance.

The coaching system Tschannen-Moran developed is quite simple. It involves a “dynamic dance that can be choreographed with four steps: Story-Empathy-Inquiry-Design.”¹⁰⁹ The first two steps help to build a relationship of trust in which the client can discover new insights and appreciate the intrinsic value of the issues the client is dealing with. That relationship and discovery creates the environment in which, through Inquiry and Design, the client can identify and take action on their strengths to achieve their goals.

During the Story step, coach and client share their stories and explore the meaning they make of their experiences. The coach practices “imaginative listening” and asks questions that “invite teachers to explore story variants and takeaways.”¹¹⁰ The coach practices Empathy during this sharing process to help the client feel “emotionally secure, understood, appreciated, and accepted in order to release their energy and channel it in creative directions.”¹¹¹ Empathy brings no-fault appreciation of

¹⁰⁸ Bob and Megan Tschannen-Moran, *Evocative Coaching* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010), xix-xxii. Note the similarity to Deutschman’s opening observations quoted above.

¹⁰⁹ Tschannen-Moran, *Evocative Coaching*, 18.

¹¹⁰ Tschannen-Moran, *Evocative Coaching*, 21.

¹¹¹ Tschannen-Moran, *Evocative Coaching*.

the client's experiences, freeing the client to look at those experiences through new eyes and explore new possibilities for the future. This positive approach is important, because "the more aware teachers are of their problems, deficits, and limitations, the less likely they are to imagine and pursue new possibilities."¹¹² In contrast, the outcome of the conversation is different when the coach focuses the inquiry on possibilities. When that happens the evocative coach naturally turns to Inquiry and Design to translate the client's eagerness into action. Here the coach asks "open-ended, strengths-based questions" which help to "elevate the focus, self-efficacy, resourcefulness and wherewithal of teachers."¹¹³ In this stage the coach assists the client in brainstorming, turning those ideas into options and then thinking through how to design experiments and take action to field test their ideas. Let us now explore each of these steps, looking at the particular skills and tools used in each, and how they might validate or enrich the Sermon Coaching Course.

Tschannen-Moran describe the process ***of Story Listening***. It unfolds in three steps. First they explore The Power of Story, then they discuss ways of Evoking Coachable Stories, and then they describe listening that is mindful, quiet, reflective and imaginative. Stories are powerful because they are how people make sense of their

¹¹² Tschannen-Moran, *Evocative Coaching*. One point of friction between the evocative approach and the sermon coaching course is the emphasis in the former on appreciative inquiry: "Instead of trying to identify and fix weaknesses, evocative coaches invite teachers to identify and build on their strengths" (p. 18). The sermon coaching course explores areas where the client feels weak, stuck, or a failure, as well as the negative feedback from survey responses in the congregation. I believe the emphasis of Appreciative Inquiry on "strengths-based questions" can enrich and better-inform the process of exploring the clients' hopes and struggles in preparing and delivering sermons.

¹¹³ Tschannen-Moran, *Evocative Coaching*, 23.

experiences. “We compress years of experience, thought, and emotion into a few compact narratives that we convey to others and tell to ourselves.”¹¹⁴ This gives the coach the opportunity to create an environment of trust and rapport within which they can draw out and work with the client’s narratives as a catalyst for new understanding and change. That is the focus of Evoking Coachable Stories. “We seek to ask questions that trigger stories related to the teacher’s learning and growth.”¹¹⁵ Such questions are open (not inviting “Yes” or “No” answers), non-judgmental (“Why?” can convey judgement and provoke defensiveness) invitations to share their experience and tease out the nuances and meanings, and significance hidden within. Tschannen-Moran suggest several such evocative questions/invitations:

Tell me the story of how you came to be a teacher.

Tell me a story that illustrates what has been working well for you.

Tell me a story about a time you tried something new.¹¹⁶

As the client tells their story the coach engages in listening that is mindful, quiet, reflective and imaginative. *Mindful* listening is calm, open minded and focused. It’s unhurried and non-critical. *Quiet* listening means adopting a relaxed and receptive stance that is comfortable with silence, doesn’t interrupt or intrude prematurely into pauses in what the other person is saying. *Reflective* listening means leaving our ideas,

¹¹⁴ Tschannen-Moran, *Evocative Coaching*, 62.

¹¹⁵ Tschannen-Moran, *Evocative Coaching*, 64.

¹¹⁶ Tschannen-Moran, *Evocative Coaching*, 67. Clearly, these questions could be altered slightly for preachers, and many more added to the list.

stories, analysis, or comparisons out of the conversation, but rather acting as “a mirror that assists the client to clarify, understand, accept, appreciate and enhance their own experience.”¹¹⁷ *Imaginative* listening means helping clients explore different facets of their story.¹¹⁸ To do this the coach must listen for the vantage points, pivot points, and lesson points in their clients’ stories. Vantage points are the perspectives of other characters in the story. The coach can ask, “How do you think it looks through the other person’s eyes?” Pivot points are intersections where a different decision would have resulted in a different outcome. The coach can ask, “What if?” Finally, lesson points represent “the moral of the story” in which the coach can ask a person to articulate lessons or takeaways from their experience. “Upon first telling, stories are like diamonds in the rough. Curiosity assists teachers to polish them into gems of personal and professional mastery.”¹¹⁹

This sort of story listening is entirely compatible with Stoltzfus’ approach, as we have seen summarized in chapter 2. Tschannen-Moran’s distinction between vantage points, pivot points and lesson points in a person’s story adds richness to Stoltzfus’ approach, and is of particular relevance for the opening sessions of the Sermon Coaching Course, in which coach and client share stories to build that trust and rapport with each other. It is also an excellent tool for the coach to use in most every session,

¹¹⁷ Tschannen-Moran, *Evocative Coaching*, 76.

¹¹⁸ Tschannen-Moran, *Evocative Coaching*, 78.

¹¹⁹ Tschannen-Moran, *Evocative Coaching*, 83.

particularly when beginning to explore a new goal or topic, when the client is feeling stuck, or discouraged, or losing direction.

The next step in the process of evocative coaching is ***Expressing Empathy***.

Tschannen-Moran help the reader to Understand Empathy, Embody Empathy, to look for Access Points for Empathy, then they develop Non-Violent Communication as a practical way of showing empathy. To understand empathy, Tschannen-Moran quotes Carl Rogers at length:

When I truly hear a person and the meanings that are important to him at that moment, hearing not simply his words, but him, and when I let him know that I have heard his own private personal meanings, many things happen. There is first a grateful look. He feels released. He wants to tell me more about his world. He surges forth in a new sense of freedom. He becomes more open to the process of change. I have often noticed that the more deeply I hear the meanings of this person, the more there is that happens. Almost always, when a person realizes he has been deeply heard, his eyes moisten. I think in some real sense he is weeping for joy. It is as though he were saying, 'Thank God somebody heard me. Someone knows what it's like to be me.'

I can testify that when...someone really hears you without passing judgement on you, without trying to take responsibility for you, without trying to mold you, it feels damn good! At these times, it has relaxed the tension in me. It has permitted me to bring out the frightening feelings, the guilts, the despair, the confusions that have been a part of my experience. When I have been listened to and when I have been heard, I am able to re-perceive my world in a new way and to go on. It is astonishing how elements that seem insoluble become soluble when someone listens, how confusions that seem irremediable turn into relatively clear flowing streams when one is heard. I have deeply appreciated the times that I have experienced this sensitive, empathic, concentrated listening.¹²⁰

This quote describes what empathetic listening is and the potentially life-changing effects it can have. Such listening has the ability to open a person to deeper

¹²⁰ Carl Rogers, *A Way of Being* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1980), 12-13. Quoted in Tschannen-Moran, *Evocative Coaching*, 86.

relationship, exploration and change. It is rooted in a non-judgmental stance that “accepts them right where they are and just the way they are,” and that helps to “facilitate acceptance, expand awareness, create openness, and generate readiness to change.”¹²¹ Empathy treasures the emotions of the other person as the “gateway to learning, growth and change.”¹²²

So how does a coach Embody Empathy? The Tschannen-Morans observed that it must bubble from the heart. They note that recent neuroscience research is discovering that the heart organ has its own very complex locus of nerves and plays its own distinctive part in the body’s memory, motivation and mobility in the satisfaction of needs.¹²³ Tschannen-Moran recommend how a coach can utilize this physiological reality: “Those who seek to cultivate empathy in their dealings with self and others would do well, then, to adopt practices that contribute to and flow from positive heart energy...[which] include breath work, meditation, journal writing, focusing, physical exercise, and getting adequate rest and sleep...find those practices that assist us to cultivate empathy and then do them on a regular basis until they become second nature.”¹²⁴ We may observe that Tschannen-Moran’s worldview limits their understanding of the human heart to empirical, physiological aspects. The Christian

¹²¹ Tschannen-Moran, *Evocative Coaching*, 87.

¹²² Tschannen-Moran, *Evocative Coaching*, 88. Notice that the place Tschannen-Moran give to empathy parallels closely Wlodkowski’s Five Pillars, the characteristics of effective teachers. Empathy is the second pillar.

¹²³ Tschannen-Moran, *Evocative Coaching*, 90.

¹²⁴ Tschannen-Moran, *Evocative Coaching*, 90.

coach is, of course, able to draw upon far richer insights into the human heart, as shown in chapter two. To that material we may add Jesus' teaching in John 7. Jesus said in verse 38, "Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow out of his heart," to which John added, "Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive." Paul echoed this teaching: "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."¹²⁵ The power of divine love working actively within Christian coaches is beyond reckoning. Clearly they have far richer resources to draw upon in developing empathy, in addition to the meditation exercises offered by the Tschannen-Morans.

Tschannen-Moran turn next to explore Access Points for Empathy. These are times when the client presents the coach with opportunities to show empathy. They include presenting energy, story elements and resistance to change. The coach can sense the client's presenting energy very early in the conversation in how the client responds to the question "How are you?" or "How would you describe your mood right now?" or "What's on your mind right now?" The coach can also find an access point for empathy in elements of the stories the client shares in the course of the conversation. In other words, the coach can listen for "signs of significance." Finally, when a client expresses resistance to change, the coach has an access point. Instead of either "giving in" to the resistance, or "doubling down" to make a case for change, the coach can express empathy, trying to uncover the reasons for it. As we saw from Prochaska et al,

¹²⁵ Romans 5:5.

readiness to change is a spectrum along which people move at their own pace. Using empathy enables the coach to share the journey.

These reflections on empathy culminate in an extended discussion of Non-Violent Communication (NVC). Empathy begins with the assumption that “Teachers do things for their own good reasons; empathy reflections seek to understand and honor those reasons as having validity in the mind of the teacher.”¹²⁶ The listener is trying to recognize and reflect those values, to distinguish and draw out those elements in the story that motivate the client. NVC proceeds by:

observations -> feelings -> needs -> requests.

While listening to the client the coach communicates *observations*, not evaluations. The coach avoids bringing personal judgements into the conversation, whether criticisms or compliments and instead seeks to value the client’s experiences. The coach seeks to explore a client’s *feelings* in the midst of their experiences and to distinguish those feelings from their thoughts interpreting them. The coach asks the person to name their feelings, or offers guesses to help the client give words to their feelings. When the feelings are identified the coach asks questions that then help the client distinguish the underlying *need* that might be generating those feelings. Having created the opportunity for the client to “become more aware of and give voice to what they are feeling and needing,”¹²⁷ the NVC process guides coach and client to make *requests*, rather than demands, in order to confirm understanding and to explore

¹²⁶ Tschannen-Moran, *Evocative Coaching*, 94.

¹²⁷ Tschannen-Moran, *Evocative Coaching*, 112.

possibilities for meeting the needs identified. Empathy creates an environment in which the client is often motivated to focus attention and energy to change. Along the way it is important for the coach to be sensitive to the client's readiness to change, and to celebrate effort and progress, which leads to the next phase in the Evocative Coaching conversation.

In discussing how the coach can help the client "connect to the presence of the Holy Spirit" in chapter two, we explored Tony Stoltzfus' approach to "Metaformation." He offered a method of following *feelings* down to their underlying *needs* in a way similar to NVC. The difference comes in the request phase when Stoltzfus invites the coach and client to turn to Jesus, inviting Jesus to join the coaching conversation and listening to his response to the client's needs-based request. The presence of Jesus in the Christian coaching process of Stoltzfus is a unique resource that the secular context of generic non-violent communication cannot offer.

The evocative coach's next stage is ***Appreciative Inquiry***. This moves the conversation from exploring the client's experiences and feelings to a forward-looking consideration of hopes and dreams, strengths and possibilities, which will form the basis for designing change. During Appreciative Inquiry (AI), the coach asks questions that help clients "to discover the best of what is, and to dream about the best of what might be."¹²⁸ As we saw in the section on AI earlier in this chapter, which focused on corporate behavior change, AI practitioners have a definite bias toward the positive.

¹²⁸ Tschannen-Moran, *Evocative Coaching*, 126.

Tschannen-Moran has done very useful work translating AI principles for use in the one-on-one context of coaching relationships. Instead of focusing on weaknesses and problems, as in the personal behavior change methodologies studied above, evocative coaching encourages people “to focus on their strengths and vitalities in order to rise above and outgrow their problems...By celebrating what is right, we connect with our passion and find the energy to fix what is wrong.”¹²⁹ Tschannen-Moran summarized all this under two catchy headings: “Illuminating the best of what is” and “imagining the best of what might be.”¹³⁰ Under these headings Tschannen-Moran offers several resources helpful for inciting appreciative conversations with teachers.

For exploring *the best of what is*, they offer Appreciative Interviews, which ask after the client’s best experiences, core values, supporting conditions and three wishes for the future. As we will see in chapter four, this is an excellent approach to use in the initial phase of the Sermon Coaching Course when inquiring after the client’s values and experiences and process as a preacher. In addition they assemble several Appreciative Assessments, tools that are tailored for assessing teachers in the classroom. These are of little use to preachers in the congregational environment, though the Congregational Survey instrument might be a starting place in developing an appreciative self-

¹²⁹ Tschannen-Moran, *Evocative Coaching*, 127.

¹³⁰ This corresponds, in appreciative terms, to the first two steps of Collins’ methodology which we saw illustrated in the diagram on page 10 of chapter two. In Collins’ approach the coach asks questions that stimulate awareness of where we are now, and vision of where we want to go. As we saw in chapter two, however, Christian realism is not inclined to focus exclusively on the positive but seeks to “get real” about negative aspects as well.

assessment tool for preachers. With clarity on what is, the client can build toward *the best of what might be*. Tschannen-Moran describe this in a compelling way:

[It] is not just about setting a goal that is out there to work toward; it is about imagining the best of what might be in ways that infuse the present with energy, guidance, and resourcefulness. Not only can we imagine the best, we can invoke the best. Imagination serves, then, as a proleptic force that brings the future into the present moment and gets people to act as if the future is breaking in upon them. It becomes a kind of incarnation.¹³¹

Please note the explicitly theological language and assumptions that inform this approach, which is remarkable given the strict secularity of Tschannen-Moran's coaching system. They import the ideas of invocation, incarnation and the realized eschatology of the new creation "breaking in" to today's world, with language very similar to that used in chapter two to describe the new creation. As relational creatures in God's image, with destiny and responsibility, we are called to participate in God's work in the world and are empowered to shape the future, and our imagination is a unique and powerful tool in doing so. As relational co-laborers with the Creator we have power to "invoke" God's presence and action in any situation, by imagining an "ideal future." The power of imagination and invocation help to "incarnate" God's presence in and through us to the world.

All this starts with our imagination. The coach can help the client tap the power of "imagining the best of what might be" by *framing aspirations* and *inviting possibilities*:

Aspirations are not isolate, egocentric visions. They are also not pipe dreams. They are rather palpable, incarnate visions that answer those larger questions in

¹³¹ Tschannen-Moran, *Evocative Coaching*, 153.

life and work regarding the contributions we make, the energy we muster, and the support we mobilize to realize the full potential of one and all...In framing aspirations we start by the need, give voice to the yearning, imagine its fulfillment and frame its significance.¹³²

Tschannen-Moran's discussion of *aspirations* is rooted (though not explicitly so) in a theology of the human being that very closely aligns with what is described in chapter two. Tschannen-Moran says that humans are "needs-meeting organisms." When needs are unmet people "feel bad and strive to get their needs met." This simple dynamic parallels the Bible's view of humans created for relationships, destiny and responsibility. In the fall, these needs associated with each aspect of our being go unmet, which sets off a restless, striving, "needs-meeting" course in life. The result is idolatry, the vain search for something to fill the "God-shaped void." The only place of true satisfaction is connecting in relationship with God, finding our destiny and taking responsibility as God's co-laborers. The reason people's needs so often go unmet in the teaching setting, in Tschannen-Moran's estimation, is "people become dispirited through the conversations and interactions we have with other people."¹³³ Teachers start out with idealistic ideas of the way things can be, but then "butt heads" with people who doubt, deconstruct, dissect, and demand. They lose sight of their aspirations and their work becomes a chore. Certainly, preachers can relate to that experience in parochial work as well, often resulting in high rates of burnout. Coaching "seeks to disrupt that

¹³² Tschannen-Moran, *Evocative Coaching*, 156.

¹³³ Tschannen-Moran, *Evocative Coaching*, 155.

downward spiral by taking a strengths-based approach to change,”¹³⁴ which stimulates motivation to devise and implement changes. The coach asks the client to see themselves and their work in new ways, to envision their future selves by building on the best of what is while stretching the status quo. This “elevates energy, improves mood, unleashes creativity, and bolsters both initiative and resilience...It takes big dreams to stir hearts and move people to action.”¹³⁵ Tony Stoltzfus couldn’t have said it better.

Aspirations are powerful motivators, but they are not enough to bring about desired change. For that a person must also *invite possibilities*, which will help translate aspirations into specific design strategies for action. At this stage, the coach asks questions to help the client tie their aspirations to current or near-term tangible possibilities of what the client would like to explore or learn or do. Tschannen-Moran is at pains to distinguish this stage from goal setting. Playing with the possibilities precedes setting goals, and it serves the purpose of giving the client a sense of their own strength, and hope, and the resources at their disposal to pursue their aspirations. Such questions include: ¹³⁶

What would you like to pay more attention to?

What variables do you think matter most?

What possibilities do you see here?

¹³⁴ Tschannen-Moran, *Evocative Coaching*, 155.

¹³⁵ Tschannen-Moran, *Evocative Coaching*, 156-157.

¹³⁶ Tschannen-Moran, *Evocative Coaching*, 159.

What can you imagine doing differently?

What would you like to see more of?

What changes would excite you?

What has worked for you in similar situations before?

Tschannen-Moran conclude their discussion of the use of Appreciative Inquiry in coaching by contrasting the strengths-based approach with other approaches to change that focus on correcting weaknesses. The contrast can be summarized in two acronyms: SWOT versus SOAP. The SWOT acronym is well-known. It focuses attention on Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. It comports nicely with the change theories offered above by Prochaska, Norcross and DiClemente, as well as the Christian realism presented in chapter 2. See, for example, the diagram of Collins' four stage coaching approach, the third of which leads the client to explicitly confront "obstacles." Tschannen-Moran observe that this analysis often fails to "generate successful change and may actually harm performance. That is because they pitch people into battles against often intractable weaknesses and threats."¹³⁷ Evocative coaching focuses on SOAP instead: Strengths, Observations, Aspirations and Possibilities. These analyses help discover the best of what is, and imagine the best of what might be. The acronym SOAP says more than the sum of its letters. It evokes an image. "SOAP lathers up new realities, imbuing the entire process with wonder, awe, fun, surprises, joy, satisfaction, and deep relationship...SOAP has a way of washing away the grime of discouragement

¹³⁷ Tschannen-Moran, *Evocative Coaching*, 168.

and making dreary perspectives sparkle anew. Strengths, observed vitalities, aspirations, and possibilities invigorate teachers with can-do energy.”¹³⁸

The coach and client are ready to move to the next stage of Evocative Coaching: ***Design Thinking***. At this point the client is inspired and confident, but to make dreams become reality coach and client must take concrete steps toward action to realize their desired possibilities. Because advice can generate resistance, or put the client in the de-motivating position of trying to implement the ideas of others, the coach asks questions instead that “call forth motivation and movement” to develop and implement new ideas. Tschannen-Moran use four processes: brain storming, exploring inertia, designing SMART action-learning experiments, and confirming commitment, each of which we will explore in turn.

The first process is brainstorming. The evocative coach acts as both a facilitator and a participant to help the client begin to bring dreams into reality, both as a facilitator and as participant. When the client asks for advice the coach redirects such requests into brainstorming sessions in which “we can work together with teachers to come up with ideas. By co-creating multiple possibilities in this way, teachers remain active and empowered in the search for more effective instructional approaches. Coaches are confirmed as one voice among many on the way to a teacher’s professional mastery.”¹³⁹ This process is a playful way of generating many ideas without being sidetracked by thoughts of implementing or evaluating them, and opens the client to

¹³⁸ Tschannen-Moran, *Evocative Coaching*, 169.

¹³⁹ Tschannen-Moran, *Evocative Coaching*, 189.

new possibilities. By participating in the process as a contributor of ideas, the coach can help spur more creativity on the part of the client.

The second tool is exploring inertia. A big part of design thinking is identifying and overcoming the underlying factors that inhibit change. A key coaching task is to invite and inspire clients to embrace change themselves. Tschannen-Moran's simple procedure for doing so begins with the assumption that the client has good reason for remaining with the status quo and takes steps to help the client understand, accept and appreciate "the stories, judgements, feelings, and needs that surround their inertia."¹⁴⁰ The first step is to gain clarity on the commitments the client has expressed for change, asking "What are you committed to doing that would make you more successful?" Once those hopes and commitments are clear, the coach takes the next step and asks, "What are you actually doing, or not doing that works against those commitments?" This helps bring to the surface the behaviors that are barring progress. When a person identifies such behaviors the coach can dig into the reasons behind those behaviors by asking "What are the hidden or competing commitments that keep those behaviors in place?" Once the client has named these assumptions it becomes much easier to for the client to makes decisions about what to do with them. Here's where the next tool in Design Thinking works comes in handy.

¹⁴⁰ Tschannen-Moran, *Evocative Coaching*, 194. Perhaps we are getting close here to Collins' third step in his process: addressing challenges. Tschannen-Moran's positive and practical approach offers much to enrich how other coaching methods deal with such challenges.

The third tool is framing innovations as experiments. One way to overcome inertia and internal resistance is to reframe new actions not as plans (which the client must make work and may fail) but as “action-learning experiments,”¹⁴¹ which are opportunities to test a hypothesis. In planning the stakes are higher because it can fail. A plan is win-lose, but an experiment is “win-learn.” In a process of trial and correction to find and refine what works, the coach guides the client to evaluate and narrow the list of options developed in the brainstorm exercise two or three options that are most appealing to pursue as experiments. As the list narrows the coach asks the client to rate each: “On a scale of 1-10 how important would you say it is to conduct this experiment at this time?” If the numbers are low, indicating lingering inertia, the coach can ask, “What would make it a higher number for you?”¹⁴² This will lead the client to either modify the experiment or go off in new directions. Once this list of experiments is settled the coach will move the client to the next step.

The next tool is Making Experiments S.M.A.R.T.¹⁴³ When an action is defined as specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound, it is clear to the client what they will be doing differently. Tschannen-Moran then recommends a series of steps for Mapping out S.M.A.R.T. experiments. The coach can ask the client a series of questions to assist:

¹⁴¹ Tschannen-Moran, *Evocative Coaching*, 197. Note the “reframe” terminology shared with Deutschman above. This is a helpful way to reframe change itself so it acquires a more playful and adventurous, less risky and onerous, feel for the client

¹⁴² Tschannen-Moran, *Evocative Coaching*, 199.

¹⁴³ See treatment in Appendix C for a full explanation of this nomenclature.

What will you do and what difference do you hope it will make?

How does that change relate to your big-picture dream?

Describe the experiment. Tell me who, what, when, where and how.

What will you need to assist you in conducting this experiment?

When and how often will you conduct this experiment?

How confident are you (1-10) of being able to conduct this experiment?

How would you like to gather and report on the results?

The final tool, or process, in design thinking is Confirming Commitment. Coaches can increase motivation and movement by confirming the client's understanding of and commitment to the experiment he or she has designed. The coach can invite the client to review the plan out loud noticing anything that might need further attention. Next the coach asks, "How ready are you to move forward?" Or "On a scale of 1 to 10 how happy are you with this design?" The coach then shares in the process of experimentation with the client going through the cycle again. Each experimental try will have generated new stories, which coach and client empathetically explore together, inquiring after what worked and didn't, leading to new designs for the future. This last phase of Evocative Coaching closely corresponds to Stoltzfus' use of S.M.A.R.T goals and the coaching funnel on in chapter two. Brainstorming matches well with Stoltzfus' coaching funnel phase for exploring possibilities and developing options. In the same way Tschannen-Moran's process for narrowing those options is very close to Stoltzfus', which has a slightly more refined way of narrowing the options by asking,

What could you do> Want to do>Will you do?

Conversely Tschannen-Moran have a more explicit and detailed way of dealing with inertia, and their use of the “experiments” metaphor adds a helpful option to the Stoltzfus’ planning process. The two are nearly identical in seeking a commitment at the end, leading to action.

This review of the Tschannen-Morans’ coaching system has turned up much of interest and usefulness in the Sermon Coaching Course designed in the next chapter. This is not surprising because there are many areas where teacher coaching and preacher coaching run on parallel, if not nearly identical tracks. Both systems focus on stimulating motivation within a relationship of trust, in which a coach asks questions and creates a climate of empathy designed to help clients share and define meaning in their stories and their aspirations. Tschannen-Moran’s extended elaboration on the character of empathy adds helpful material to the “I am for you” approach offered by Stoltzfus. In the same way, Stoltzfus has much to add to Tschannen-Moran’s “non-violent communication” technique with the highly dynamic possibility being able to turn to Jesus throughout the process. The two systems are also strongly similar in the positive mien both assume. Tschannen-Moran’s approach, informed by appreciative inquiry, is relentlessly positive, in contrast to Christian realism, which acknowledges the negative as well. Tschannen-Moran are quite eloquent in their description of the power of imagination, but are uncharacteristically dependent on Christian language and theological categories to express it. Evocative Coaching and the Christian Coaching approach described in chapter two also share an understanding of human beings as “needs-meeting” creatures. The Christian view of the human heart and the concept of

idolatry add much to the secular understanding offered by Tschannen-Moran. In all, the last two stages of Evocative Coaching, the appreciative inquiry and design thinking steps, show numerous parallels to the approach taken by both Stoltzfus and Collins, with some difference of descriptive language and emphasis. Each system has points that can enrich the other's. Tschannen-Moran's step of reframing innovations as experiments is a very helpful way to help clients overcome their inertia in trying out new ideas and behaviors.

This comparison of a Christian and a secular coaching system has confirmed Collins' summary of the three distinctive elements Christian theology brings to the discipline of secular coaching. First, and foremost is the biblical worldview. Secular coaching methodologies urge coaches to facilitate the client's efforts to look inside themselves for their strengths, values, passion and purpose in a way that is constrained by few limits or absolutes. Collins observed, "God is nowhere to be seen."¹⁴⁴ In contrast, the Christian coach and client inhabit a universe rich in meaning and possibility, able to discern and act upon objective realities within the drama of creation, fall and redemption. The Christian account of where we came from, what we are made for, what is wrong with us, and how it can be fixed has explanatory power that accounts for the effectiveness of coaching. Oriented in that story, Christians understand the relational connection, purpose and responsibility that people seek and experience, as God-given realities. The fact that the Tschannen-Morans inadvertently resort to

¹⁴⁴ Collins, *Christian Coaching*, 24-26.

Christian language and theology in describing the power of imagination gives strong evidence of the importance of the Christian worldview undergirding coaching methodology.

Second, is the spiritual life of the coach. The Christian coach seeks to serve the client by walking in the footsteps of Jesus. Jesus was not only the most influential person in history, but was also the greatest coach, as demonstrated in chapter two. That paradigmatic example is a powerful force to shape the Christian coach's perspective and motivation and skills according to what is true and real. There is nothing else like it. Furthermore, we saw that the Christian coach can draw upon the presence of the Holy Spirit during the coaching conversation, adding a life-changing experiential dimension to secular coaching methodologies. We saw this with particular clarity when the Tschannen-Morans discussed for empathy and the need coaches have for "bubble up" within "the heart." Their account of how that happens, however, is noticeable thin compared to the Christian's. Though coaching methodologies per se have grown up only in the last century, the Triune God has been using, and literally 'inspiring' a coaching approach for millennia, which has created a relational and conceptual environment within which secular coaching approaches could emerge in recent decades.

Third, the Christian coach recognizes that no one is truly "neutral." While accepting, and appreciating the client's perspectives and values, and refraining from imposing an agenda on the conversation, the Christian coach does so with an ultimate vision in mind. That ultimate vision sees the client experiencing the fullness of their

relationship, destiny and responsibility with God, in contrast to contemporary secular world views which elevate human will and choice in a universe free of norms. The Christian coach's vision will inevitably influence the coaching process, even when he or she is trying to maintain neutrality to be unreservedly "with" and "for" the client. The Christian coach knows that ultimately there is no neutrality, enabling both coach and client to be better in-touch with reality. Collins observed that this realization has been dawning within secular coaching and therapeutic methodologies. Even the great Carl Rogers, founder of "non-directive counseling" replaced that name with "person-centered counseling," apparently because research was showing that total neutrality and lack of direction is a myth."¹⁴⁵

Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented research in four distinct fields: behavior change theory, adult learning theory, Appreciative Inquiry, and secular coaching methodologies. It has put principal authors from each field into dialogue, and has demonstrated how Christian Coaching in general, and the Sermon Coaching Course, employ the insights and assimilate the challenges of each. Starting with behavior change theory, we studied the seminal work of James O. Prochaska, John C. Norcross, and Carlo C. DiClemente in their book *Changing for Good*, as well as the popularizing work of Alan Deutschman and his book, *Change or Die*. Their trans-theoretical approach shares with coaching a desire to

¹⁴⁵ Collins, *Christian Coaching*, 25.

offer an alternative to traditional therapy, and their emphasis on personal responsibility is identical with coaching. Their stages of change can aid the coach in discerning the path a person is taking on the journey of change. Furthermore, Prochaska et al. identify the “change processes” that help people alter their behavior, offering considerable, research-based enrichment for Christian coaching systems, which sometimes leaves them implicit or undeveloped. Deutschman reinforces coaching with his emphatic focus on the power of relationships to facilitate change. Such relationships are built on the disciplines of listening and asking questions, and inspiring hope for those discouraged about their ability to change. Furthermore, Deutschman enriches coaching with his emphasis on taking action in the process of change. The research-based conclusions of Prochaska et al. and Deutschman offer both useful tools for the Christian coach as well as a formidable confirmation of the coaching approach, and an explanation of why coaching works so well in helping individuals make real changes in life. These authors contributed much to the Sermon Coaching Course presented in chapter four.

Next, we surveyed the ideas of Appreciative Inquiry, which does for organizations what behavior change theory does for individuals. The five principles developed in AI guide practitioners in an approach that employs questions to draw forth the best of what IS in an organization, on the way to achieving the best of what CAN BE in the future. AI is deeply committed to focusing on the positive as to overcome challenges, and provides a needed corrective to the common tendency to be paralyzed by problems. Christian coaching shares this emphasis, but qualified by Christian realism, which deals forthrightly with the negative effects of the Fall in all situations. Principles

developed through experience at the organizational level yield useful insight to the practice of coaching, particularly the theoretical understanding of what makes questions so powerful in stimulating change. The fact that the four-step process employed in AI for organizational change is roughly equivalent to similar processes developed in Christian Coaching systems offers strong validation of Christian Coaching.

Deutschman demonstrated the importance of “helping relationships” in facilitating change, and the section on Adult Learning Theory described the teacher in that vital relational role as “change agent.” The work of two authors, Malcom Knowles and Raymond Wlodkowski, helped us understand how to facilitate adult learning and how to increase the motivation of adults to engage in learning, which is at the heart of changing. Knowles’ six principles of effective adult learning demonstrate that coaching methodology is perhaps the ultimate expression of the ideal andragogue, in the one-on-one learning relationship, thus strongly validating the coaching approach. Wlodkowski rooted Knowles’ philosophical foundation in the physiology of motivation and offered dozens of research-based strategies that enable the facilitator of change and learning (whether “teacher” or “coach”) to stimulate motivation to learn. Coaching employs approximately two-thirds of them. At nearly every turn, coaching methodology has been substantiated by the work of Knowles and Wlodkowski. The Sermon Coaching Course has been greatly enriched as well.

After our exploration of Behavior Change Theory, Appreciative Inquiry, and Adult Learning Theory we brought the discussion closer to home with a study of the school-based teacher coaching methodology developed by Bob and Megan Tschannen-Moran

in their book, *Evocative Coaching*. Their four-step process begins by building a relationship of trust in which the client can discover new insights and pinpoint their values. That relationship and discovery creates the environment in which, through inquiry and design, the client can identify and take action on their strengths to achieve their goals. The parallels between the Tschannen-Morans' approach and the Sermon Coaching Course made the study particularly fruitful. Both approaches are tailored to the personal growth and skill development of people in the helping professions, and both are aimed at increasing the effectiveness of their institutions, whether schools or churches. That study revealed strong commonality between the two approaches, as well as some variances. We noted the many useful perspectives and tools for Christian coaching the Tschannen-Morans have offered.

From the perspective of these diverse disciplines, it is clear that the discipline of coaching, in general, and the Sermon Coaching Course, in particular, make great use of the insights and mandates they offer. In the process of studying them we have gathered many useful tools and concepts to enrich the Sermon Coaching Course, to which we turn in the next chapter.

THE SERMON COACH:
HOW A COACHING APPROACH HELPS PREACHERS IMPROVE

A THESIS-PROJECT
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF
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CHAPTER FOUR

PROJECT DESIGN

This chapter describes in detail the process of providing sermon coaching to a client. It prescribes the steps the coach should take to begin and to conclude the coaching relationship. Since each coaching relationship is unique, tailored to the priorities and pace of the client, what happens in-between the initial and concluding phases is impossible to prescribe. For that in-between phase I have offered a verbatim account of a coaching relationship with a client named “David.” This account illustrates the mindset, and several skills and techniques used by Christian coaches to help their clients define and achieve their goals.

Initial Phase Sessions

The sessions at the beginning of the Sermon Coaching Course are designed to lay a foundation for the client’s learning and growth as a preacher. That foundation is built by: 1) beginning a trusting relationship between the client and coach, and 2) asking the client to reflect on their preaching values and creative process, and 3) gathering feedback from their congregations regarding their effectiveness. Progress in contemplation and preparation to begin a trusting relationship the coach must combine clear expectations and personal transparency. As we saw in our study of behavior change theory in chapter three, “helping relationships” are of paramount importance in

supporting a person through the steps they take to improve how they prepare and deliver sermons. When beginning with a new client in the sermon coaching program, the first goal is to lay a strong foundation for a relationship of trust and transparency and collaboration. This starts with a clear understanding of what coaching involves and clear expectations for coach and client in the relationship. The Welcome Letter and Coaching Agreement¹ help define those expectations and sketch a road map for the journey ahead. 2) Next the coach and client begin to get to know each other. That process starts with the client doing the Myers-Briggs personality assessment so the coach can review it before the first meeting with the client. The coach can highlight the client's strong preferences and see how those might contribute to the person's strengths and struggles as a preacher. A coach competent in using MBTI can anticipate the client's personality and adapt the coaching approach to the client's temperament, preferences and style. The coach and client are now ready for the first session in which they build trust and practice transparency by sharing life stories. One side benefit of this process is it demonstrates how a coach asks and listens sympathetically, without judging or interrupting. Not only does this create an atmosphere of safety for the client, but by asking and listening the coach begins to orient the client to what coaching is and what learning through relationship with others is like.²

¹ Appendix C.

² In terms of the change processes defined by Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente, this is a process of consciousness raising to help the client move through stages of Contemplation and Preparation.

Session 1 is a get-to-know-you session, 1.5 hours long.

Goals:

Begin learning about each other's lives and values.

Establish a level of trust that will allow transparency to develop

Exercise 1: Take approximately 30 minutes to review the MBTI report.

Coaching Questions:

How would you rate the accuracy of the report on a scale of 1-10?

Where did it most aptly describe you? Where was it most off-base?

Where would you say, "Yeah, but..."? How would you rephrase it?

How do these personality traits show up in your preparation and presentation of sermons?

Exercise 2: Share life stories

The coach and client explore significant experiences that shaped each as a person, as a disciple of Jesus, and as a preacher. Karen Lee-Thorpe said, "Telling stories is the easiest, fastest, safest way to help people get their trust questions answered."³

The coach goes first, setting the tone of transparency and modeling "how to" share in this way. Take approximately 20 minutes to share aspects of your life story that will help the client identify with you. Highlight life-shaping events, or difficult challenges

³ Karen Lee-Thorpe, *How to Ask Great Questions* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1998), 16.

and the role that others played in helping you overcome/learn/grow/succeed. After your story, follow-up with some questions for the client.

Coaching Questions:

Do you have follow-on questions about my story?

What stood out most to you in my story?

After the follow-on discussion about your story, ask the client to share his/her story.

Afterward ask questions to follow your curiosity about the client's story, to draw out the significance of those experiences and, to help them articulate what's important to them in these experiences.

Coaching Questions:

You mentioned a formative event... I'd love to hear more about that.

How did that shape you as a preacher today?

How does that influence the message you want to convey when you preach?

How would you like to include that in our time for future reflection?

Along the way, the coach can practice imaginative listening, as defined in by Tschannen-Moran in chapter two, page 128, keeping alert to vantage points, pivot points and lesson points in the story. Now that coach and client have gained some familiarity with one another they are ready to turn to the client's experience of preaching.

Session 2: Explore how the client understands their preaching.

Goals:

Gain familiarity with the client's preparation process.

Understand what values inform the client's preaching

Understand what result they hope to achieve.

"Adult learning experts advocate performing a needs assessment and a context analysis prior to setting learning objectives...Needs assessment methods include doing a gap analysis between current and desired proficiencies, looking at performance reviews, looking at best practices, administering formal assessments and soliciting information from others."⁴ This course utilizes the gap analysis method, which first examines how the preacher prepares to preach sermons and what kind of results it yields (session 2), and second, administers a survey of the congregation to gather feedback from others (sessions 3-6).

Exercise 1: Explore their foundation.

As we learned from Wlodkowski's theory of adult learning in chapter three, "A biological approach to learning is to find out what the learner understands and can do."⁵ Since the neural networks that influence our attitudes and behaviors take shape over time, through repetition, it is important to build on what is already there. The only way

⁴ David Rock and Linda J. Page, *Coaching with the Brain in Mind: Foundations for Practice* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2009), 233.

⁵ Raymond J. Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn: A Comprehensive Guide for Teaching All Adults*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 13.

to do that is to explore the foundation of the preacher's practice in their homiletical training and education and experience. The coach, therefore, begins there.

Coaching Questions:

What do you remember most strongly from your preaching classes?

What text(s) did you use? What stands out from it most clearly in your memory?

What have you retained in your practice from that training?

What preachers have been most influential to your approach to preaching?

What have you retained in your preparation and preaching style from their example?

Exercise 2: Define in detail the Client's preparation process. 40 min⁶

It is helpful for both the client and coach to explore the creative process in detail, exploring what they do to prepare a sermon, what those activities contribute to the sermon, and how effective they are. This is helpful for the coach, as part of the get-to-know-you process. It is helpful for client as well, because preachers often develop their prep process by imperceptible increments, making implicit decisions following unspoken values, under the demands of the busy parish work-week. They often do what they do, when they do it, "just because." When asked to articulate those reasons, however, the preacher is able to begin critically appraising their process, envisioning ways it might be improved. Describing it in this way gets their creative juices flowing. It yields insight and facilitates the process of change from the Precontemplation stage to

⁶ If the client is an 'S', it might be helpful to do Exercise 1 first, beginning with the actual and the factual before moving to the theoretical and abstract. If the client is an 'N' it might be helpful to begin with Exercise 2.

Contemplation. Often during this time the preacher will begin to identify several goals for improvement worth pursuing in the months ahead, moving into the Preparation stage of change.⁷

Coaching Questions:

Describe your sermon preparation process. When do you begin working on a sermon?

What shape does your creative process most often take in the week(s) before you preach?

How much time do you invest along the way?

Where in the process do you most often experience difficulty or frustration?

If you could change anything you'd like about the process, what would you differently?

What is working with your approach? What else is working? What else?

What talents and abilities are serving you well? What else?

What's the best thing that's happening now? What else?

What fills you with energy and hope? What else?

What enables you to do as well as you are doing? What else?⁸

Exercise 2: The client articulates their values and vision for preaching. 30 min

Again, there is great power in speaking unspoken values and dreams aloud, making the implicit explicit. A sermon coach will often work with clients who are discouraged about their preaching, feeling burned out, or bored, or like their creative

⁷ See discussion of stages of change from Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente in chapter three p. 87.

⁸ These last five questions are borrowed from Bob and Megan Tschannen-Moran in *Evocative Coaching* (p. 23) and are examples of the "strengths-based" approach of Appreciative Inquiry.

juices have dried up. Asking them about their values and vision in preaching helps the client return to first principles, recover their “first love” in preaching, and stimulate again their motivation to excel.⁹

Coaching Questions:

What was one of your best preaching experiences? What made it so rewarding?

What do you hope preaching might accomplish in a church?

What matters most to you in preaching?

What would you like to do well?

How would you describe the role preaching currently plays in your ministry context?

How would you LIKE preaching to function in your ministry context?

What do you seek to achieve through your preaching?

What measurable impact do you see in people through your preaching?

What impact would you LIKE to see? What three wishes would you like to have come true?¹⁰

Along the way, the coach will have opportunity to dig deeper, following either her curiosity, or signs of significance expressed by the client. The coach might use the following techniques to dig deeper with the client:

1. Peel the onion. “What about that is important to you?” After reflecting back what the coach heard the client say, the coach can keep asking that same

⁹ Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente would identify this technique, and the ones that follow, as examples of the change processes of “emotional arousal” and “self-reevaluation.”

¹⁰ These first and last questions are taken from Tschannen-Moran’s examples of Appreciative Interviews, in *Evocative Coaching*, 135.

question, peeling back the layers of the client's motivation, until reaching the core values. This exercise, though sometimes uncomfortable, will help the client articulate their deepest, often-unspoken values.

2. Seek connections. As the client discusses these values, the coach can relate the client's values to the life experiences they shared in their life story summary. The coach can ask the client, "Where do you think that comes from?" The coach looks for connections, and inquires about them: "Something you said just now makes me think of last time we talked you told me about when you..., I'm curious what connection you might see there?"

During these conversations, the coach takes notes on areas where the client might like to improve their preaching. These will become the material from which the client will form goals. Having explored the client's sermon prep process, the impact of the sermons, and how those relate to the client's values and life experiences, the coach is ready to introduce the congregational survey.

Session 3: Transition to the congregational survey.

Goals:

Learn what is most interesting and memorable for the client from the first two sessions.

Gauge and stimulate the client's motivation to conduct the survey.

Since conducting the survey is a big piece of work and seeking anonymous feedback is often anxiety-inducing, strong motivation is important to help the client overcome these obstacles. This session is all about uncovering the client's hesitations and values related to the survey, and helping her to articulate the benefit she sees coming from it. This will help to strengthen her ownership of this part of the process, to motivate her to overcome the difficulties and risks that are part of it. If the client is particularly anxious, the coach can use Stoltzfus' technique, described in chapter two, of following a person's feelings down to the underlying desire to help the client find Jesus' provision in the midst of their feelings of anxiety.

Exercise 1: Review ground covered.

Before transitioning to the survey it is helpful to ask the client to describe their experience with coaching so far. This will help them benchmark its value for them to this point. It will also help the coach discern the client's engagement with the process and what the client values about the coaching relationship. It's a good sign if the client has detailed recall of the goals and some evidence of beginning to work on them since the last session.

Coaching Questions:

What stood out to you about our conversation?

What was most helpful?

Is there anything you'd like to go back to and address again?

What areas for improvement have you begun to identify? The coach can help the client by filling in from notes the coach has jotted down, if needed.

How have you seen yourself beginning to work on these in your preaching since we last met?

Exercise 2: Coach the client toward the survey.

The client will likely need to make a gradual transition to the survey to warm up to the idea. Remember, the survey is not their idea, but the coach's. Since polling their congregation is not likely to be at the top of the client's list of priorities the coach will need to proactively develop the client's motivation for the undertaking. The coach can begin by asking the client to follow their curiosity by exploring what questions the client would like to ask the congregation, and to stimulate their imagination by articulating the benefits they anticipate from conducting the survey. The coach can say, "It's been helpful in these last sessions to hear you describe the areas you think you'd like to improve your preaching. Now I'm curious..."

Coaching questions:

If you asked your people about your preaching what do you think they would say?

What questions would you like to ask them?

What benefits would you gain from gathering the perspective of people you preach to?

On a scale of 1-10 how would you rate your interest in hearing from them?

What could we do to increase that number?

If the client is coming up short on their perceived benefits of conducting the survey the coach can share personal perspective on the importance of the survey. “I’ve seen how the survey helps in these ways: Our partial view gets broadened. We honor our hearers by asking. We alert them that we are working on this. We show them we are serious about it when we improve. We have concrete metrics to measure our progress as preacher and coach. Which of these benefits appeal most to you?” At this point the client has had opportunity to evaluate the process so far and is engaged with the benefits of conducting the survey. In a follow-up email the coach can help the client continue this thought process by listing the questions they’d like to ask their congregation along with the draft survey form, and asking the client to compare the two. How many of the client’s questions appear, in one form or another, in the survey instrument? Is the wording of the survey instrument suitable? This homework exercise will prepare the client for the next session.

Session 4: Set up the survey: Gather information from the client's preaching context.

Goals:

Prepare the survey instrument for use in the congregation.

Plan the logistics of conducting and analyzing the survey.

Exercise 1: Edit the survey instrument.

In the previous session the coach asked the client to reflect on what questions they'd like to ask the congregation, recorded this list and sent it to the client along with a draft of the survey instrument. The coach asked the client to review the survey and see whether/where his questions are already included in the survey instrument and to think about edits he'd like to make. Ask the client to compare the questions they suggested in session 3 with the questions in the draft survey instrument.

Coaching Questions:

Where do you see your questions lining up with the survey questions?

What questions would you like to add to the survey?

What questions would you like to edit or remove from the survey?

As the coach and client make changes to the survey, the coach can review the survey itself, noting the three kinds of information it gathers (demographic, quantitative, and qualitative), and the value of each.

Exercise 2: Plan survey logistics.

The coach supports the client in planning the logistics for conducting the survey. Administering a survey to a congregation is a large, and often unfamiliar undertaking that can be disruptive of the regular rhythms of Sunday morning, so the client will likely

need help thinking through the details. There are significant choices the client will need to make, particularly about whether to broadcast the survey to the whole congregation, or to target a representative group within the congregation. In large congregations the latter may be preferable to keep the amount of data manageable.

Coaching Questions:

On which Sunday will you conduct the survey? How many services?¹¹

How many survey forms will you distribute?

How will you distribute forms?

How will you collect forms?

How will you brief the congregation about filling out and submitting the survey?

What do you think about video recording the sermon?

How will you video record the sermon?

Whose camera and tripod equipment?

Who will set up and run the equipment?

Who will make and send the video file?

¹¹ The preacher has a choice whether to conduct a survey of the whole congregation, or to gather a representative sample of the congregation to survey. Here's how David described his approach to surveying a sample of the congregation: "I tried as best as I could to get a broad sample of the congregation in the people I chose. I've covered all the demographics present in the church. I divided people from the directory into groups based on age and then tried to select a few people from each group based on the following categories (gender, married/unmarried, kids/no kids, long term member/newer member.). I mailed a letter and a survey to all of them at the end of last week. I will email them on Saturday reminding them of the survey and I will make extra surveys available on Sunday morning to those people. I've asked 45 people to participate so we'll see what happens."

Exercise 3: Anticipate next steps after the survey.

Once the client has conducted the survey, then the real work begins. It is important for the coach to help the client consider what to do immediately following the survey. It is helpful to ask them to visualize Sunday afternoon when they return to their office and empty the survey forms onto their desk. The coach can help the client begin planning how they'll deal with both their emotions and the raw data. Anticipating their feelings will help client and coach to make strategies to deal with internal obstacles that might hinder productive use of the data. Anticipating their interpretive process will help the client and coach make the most of those early hours and days, after conducting the survey, to efficiently organize the data and draw useful conclusions from it.

Coaching Questions:

Imagine how you will feel as you gather the survey forms on your desk Sunday afternoon?

How will you organize the forms?

What sort of responses will you be most immediately drawn to?

How do you see yourself summarizing the responses to the quantitative questions?

How about the qualitative questions?

To this point, the groundwork has been laid for the client to get maximum value from the congregational survey. There is, however, one task that remains: discuss how to analyze the results. Since little time will likely remain in this session, the coach can send a follow-up email with some helpful tips for organizing and analyzing the data:

1. Number the survey response forms consecutively.
2. Tally responses to the quantitative portion of the survey by question.
3. Transcribe the written responses by question.
4. List major themes (mentioned 3+ times) for each qualitative question.
5. Send me a file with the results.

Session 5-6 - Support the client in analyzing the results of the survey.

Coach and client are approaching the end of the preliminary stage in the process. We have already surfaced the client's priorities for improvement. The survey results will likely confirm those priorities, increase the urgency for some, and might add more to the list. It will be important for the coach to try to write down as much of what the client is saying as possible. These notes will be a useful resource in listing priorities for improvement and developing them into goals. The exercises that follow can take a lot of time, so it will be helpful for coach and client to plan on spending approximately two hours together on them. That can either be done as one long session, or two separate sessions. The long session might be more beneficial because the results are best analyzed while the sermon is fresh in the preacher's mind.

Goals:

Glean points from the congregation's feedback to refine the preacher's priorities for improvement.

Exercise 1: How did it go?

This is an opportunity to review the context of the survey results to get a sense of the situation that Sunday, how things went in the preparation and delivery of the sermon.

Coaching Questions:

How did the sermon feel to you?

Did you do anything different than you normally do in preparation or delivery?

What was the main point you were trying to make?

What action did you ask them to take?

How would you summarize the flow of the sermon?

Exercise 2: Survey impressions.

The coach moves now to the survey results themselves, drawing from the client the impressions they have gained so far. This is a useful way to get into the material and get the client's creative and analytical juices flowing. Often the client's initial responses and reflections will be the most motivationally significant for them.

Coaching Questions:

Did you have any issues with administering the survey and collating the results?

What stood out to you from the survey results?

What patterns do you see in the responses?

What initial conclusions are you drawing?

Exercise 3: Analyze results in the quantitative section of the survey.

With the client's insights duly noted, the coach asks the client to review the responses to questions 1-9. This will likely yield further insight and additional priorities for improvement. If the client has expressed consternation at the results or anxiety about criticisms being offered, it will be helpful for the coach to take time to look first to the strengths of the sermon as expressed in the results. Look for the 5s and 4s and accentuate the positive. If the client seems relaxed about the results, go straight to areas for improvement.

Coaching Questions:

In questions 1-9 where did people express the most "strong" agreement?

What did people say about that in their written responses to question 12?

Where do you see less agreement? For each of those areas ask:

What do you think they are referring to?

How did that issue come up in people's written comments in questions 13-15?

How does that look from your perspective?

Is this an issue you'd like to make into a priority for improvement?

How would you state it?

What are your priorities for improvement at this point?

Exercise 4: Analyze the results of the qualitative section of the survey.

The data in this section is more difficult to get our arms around. People are speaking in their own words and can be all over the map. The coach leads the client to look for patterns in the data, to group people's responses into similar response categories by theme and to weight the responses by frequency.

Coaching Questions:

What was the main idea of your sermon?

How many people got really close to restating it in questions 10?

What were you asking people to do in your sermon?

How many people accurately named it in question 11?

What do you conclude about the clarity of your sermon from questions 10-11?

What were the strengths people identified in question 12?

Would you say those are typical of your preaching?

Did you do something differently in this sermon?

What major themes did you find in people's responses to question 13-15?

Any surprises there?

What would you like to make into priorities for improvement?

With the results of the congregational survey in-hand the client is ready to set specific goals for improved preaching. To get the client started in that direction the coach can ask the client to begin turning areas for improvement into goals. In a follow-up email the coach sends the notes taken from the previous session(s) capturing the client's evolving list of priorities for improvement and the S.M.A.R.T. Goal Guide.¹² The coach asks the client to take the notes and begin working them into S.M.A.R.T. format.

¹² Appendix C. Albert Bandura, a path-breaking theorist in andragogy has said, "The selection of well-defined objectives, both intermediate and ultimate, is an essential aspect of any self-directed program of change. The goals that individuals choose for themselves must be specified in sufficiently detailed behavioral terms to provide adequate guidance for the actions that must be taken daily to attain desired outcomes" (cited in Knowles, Holton and Swanson, *The Adult Learner*, 103).

Session 7 – Developing S.M.A.R.T. goals.

Through the preceding sessions, the client has identified areas to improve their preparation and delivery of sermons. Some of those areas were raised by the preacher, others were identified by the congregation. The coach has carefully recorded those priorities for improvement as the client identified them and has reviewed the growing list periodically with the client for confirmation. Building on the homework the client has done since the last session, it is now time to review that list and make those areas for improvement into S.M.A.R.T. goals.

Goal:

The client will develop a list of S.M.A.R.T. goals, which summarize the specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timely outcomes they desire to reach in future coaching sessions.

Exercise 1: Finalize the list of areas for improvement.

It is likely that the list is long with some redundant and some extraneous material in it so it is important to cull the list. One way to do that is to determine what is most relevant (the 'R' in S.M.A.R.T.) in each area of improvement on the list, exploring how it expresses the client's values and priorities.

Coaching Questions:

Are there areas that overlap or are redundant?

What is important or urgent about this area of improvement?

What do you struggle with in doing this?

What will be the benefits of improving?

Have we covered everything? What would you like to add to what we have here?

Exercise 2: Transform each area of improvement into a S.M.A.R.T. goal.

The coach asks questions that will help the client systematically think through each area of improvement and focus it into a goal that is specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timely. Coaching Questions:

Since areas for improvement are unique to each client, there are no “Coaching Questions” that can be suggested for all situations. Instead, here is an example of how a coach asks questions to guide the client to make a SMART goal.¹³ We pick up with David, reviewing survey responses to his sermon, expressed in surveys he had collected. On survey question #1 respondents expressed some ambivalence whether the preacher communicated a “single main idea” in the sermon. In reflecting on this response David identified some ways the sermon might have been confusing to the hearers.

Coach: How have these been issues for you in the past?

Client: Coming up with one main idea is difficult. I’ve got all these good ideas that would be fun to preach, but which one is the MAIN idea? I usually end up with way too much material that ends up like a mongoloid lump. How do I come up with the main idea in studying and writing? How do I communicate that? And what if I pick the wrong idea? What if it’s so narrow it’s not relevant to the congregation?

At this point the coach must suppress the urge to become a “teller” in response to the client’s question. Instead of answering I reflected to him what I was hearing.

¹³ From this point, the coaching course format in this chapter shifts from prescribing each session step-by-step, to presenting an example of what the coaching sessions looked like for one client. Since each coaching relationship is unique, tailored to the priorities and pace of the client, it is impossible to prescribe a one-size-fits-all approach to the many sessions that make up the middle part of this coaching course. The verbatim account that follows, with a client named “David,” illustrates the mindset, and several skills and techniques used by a Christian coach to help one clients define and achieve his goals.

Coach: I hear you expressing two values here: 1) be faithful to the intent of the text, and 2) be relevant to the congregation. Is that correct? How would you express that as a goal for future sermons?

Client: “Have a single main idea in the sermon that is faithful to the text and relevant to the people.”

Coach: Ok, how can you make that more Specific?¹⁴ What do you mean by ‘have...’?

Client: Every sermon will have a single main idea that is faithful to the text...

Coach: Ok, what do you mean by ‘faithful to the text’?”

Client: Corresponds to the main emphasis of the text.

Coach: OK, that’s more specific. How can you make it more compact?

Client: It mirrors the author’s main idea... and the more I think of it the ‘relevant to the congregation’ part is actually another goal related to the 4th question about illustrations etc.

Coach: Good job. We are getting much more specific. So far we have “Every sermon will have a single main idea that mirrors the author’s main idea. Let’s think about the second criterion of a S.M.A.R.T goal, Measurable. How will you know that you are doing this?

Client: I’ll know I’m doing this by the way I exegete the text, making sure I discover the author’s main point.

Coach: OK, so you’ll be able to measure fidelity to the author’s main idea by your study process, which will reliably yield that result. Is that what you are saying?

Client: Yes.

Coach: How else will you know?

Client: I’ll write down the author’s idea and then refine it.

Coach: So far we have, ‘Every sermon will have a single main idea that mirrors the author’s main idea, which I will write down.’ OK, that sounds Achievable and

¹⁴ The ‘S’ of S.M.A.R.T.

we've already established that it's Relevant. Next is Time specific. When will you do this?

Client: I'll do it in every sermon. By Tuesday of the week I'm preaching.

Coach: Great. Starting when?

Client: This week.

Coach: Great work! So here's your goal: 'Effective immediately, every sermon will have a single main idea that mirrors the author's main idea, which I will write down by Tuesday of the week I preach.' Now THAT sounds like a S.M.A.R.T. goal! Would you like to do more work on it, or go on to the next one?"

The coach works with the client to refine each area for improvement into a goal, in a way similar to the above. These goals will establish the base-line for moving forward in the coaching program, and for evaluating the process at the end of the course. During the remainder of the year the coach will use coaching techniques to help the client translate these goals into actions that will transform the client's preparation and delivery of sermons. Along the way, as the client achieves goals the coach can help the client identify and achieve new goals that might emerge. With the initial set of goals on the table the client chooses the direction in which to move ahead. The client might wish to take time to move across the goals, make plans for each goal and implement them all together. Or the client may choose to focus on one goal at a time, moving down into that goal to develop an action plan, then work on implementing the goal over one or more sessions, before moving on to the next goal. The coach shares these options and lets the client decide which approach will be most useful. At this point the client is ready to dig into his goal(s) and take the steps that will help plan and take action to turn a goal into reality.

Session 8: Work the Coaching Funnel

Once the client is ready to begin implementing a goal (regardless of focusing on one at a time, or all together) each goal will need to be developed into an action plan. The coach can guide the client using “the Coaching Funnel” developed by Tony Stoltzfus.



Figure 6. The Coaching Funnel

Stoltzfus said, the funnel provides “a visual model of a coaching conversation which allows ample time on the front end to explore the situation before generating options and actions. It starts with a narrowly focused **goal**...Then the coach widens the conversation with open questions that allow the person to more fully explore what’s going on in the **situation**...Getting more information on the table helps the client generate potential **solutions** to the problem. Then the conversation begins to narrow again. The client **evaluates** these options and decides on a course of action. The coaching interaction concludes when the client chooses specific **steps** of action to move toward the goal.”¹⁵

¹⁵ Stoltzfus, *Coaching Questions*, 30. Emphasis added. The diagram above is the author’s adaptation of Stoltzfus’ design. This funnel exercise is scalable. It can fill one session or several, depending on the pace

Exercise 1: prioritize your goals.

In many cases the priorities will become obvious in the course of forming and refining goals. It will be clear which goal the client will want to move on first, often stated within the “time-specific” aspect of the goal itself. If it is not clear, however, the coach will need to help the client prioritize.

Coaching Questions:

Which goal do you think is most urgent?

Which goal is easiest to accomplish?

Which goal do you want to start with first?

Exercise 2: Exploration.

Tony Stoltzfus said of the Exploration stage, “Once a goal is set, it’s time to fully explore the situation, what led up to it, and what is going on under the surface.

Exploration can involve probing both the external situation and the client’s internal responses to what is happening.”¹⁶ Since many of the client’s goals have emerged in the process of analyzing their preaching situation much of this work may have already been accomplished. It might be helpful at this point to recall the context of the goal in earlier conversations to make it fresh and alive. Here’s an example of how the coach can guide the process, using Goal 1 from the previous session. Goal 1 states: “Effective immediately, every sermon will have a single main idea that mirrors the author’s main idea, which I will write down by Tuesday of the week I preach.”

set by the client. I have therefore laid it out in exercises, rather than sessions, which can be arranged to fit the client’s pace.

¹⁶ Stoltzfus, *Coaching Questions*, 30.

Coach: What concern is behind that goal for you?

Client: My concern is how do I do that? What if I come up with multiple main ideas?

Coach: Let's do a mental exercise. Describe for me the moment on Tuesday when you fulfill that goal. Help me picture where you are, what you are doing, how you are feeling and what you are thinking.

Client: I've got my Bible reading open on my desk and I'm writing on a legal pad. I've just settled in on the idea. It feels right. It's not complicated. I can preach it. But then five more ideas jump into my head: 'But what about this? What about that other idea? What about the commentary point, or background idea?'

Coach: Ok, what have you done to get yourself to this point?

Client: I've read the passage 10-15 times in multiple settings over days. I've done some background work on the passage. I've studied Church Fathers commentaries, Aquinas' *Catena*. ESV Study Bible.

Coach: How does this process result in too much unfocused material?

Client: Clearly the process results in the outcome.

Coach: What are some ways you could change the process to achieve your goal?

Exercise 3: Options.

Tony Stoltzfus said, "This step in the coaching process pushes the client to think creatively to develop multiple potential options. Often the first several ideas are ones that the person has already considered; the process becomes genuinely powerful when clients get creative and think beyond the boxes they are stuck in."¹⁷

Coaching Questions:

What could you do here to move yourself toward your goal?

¹⁷ Stoltzfus, *Coaching Questions*, 31.

What other options can you think of?

Let's shoot for at least five potential solutions. What else could you do?

You mentioned earlier that _____. Does that suggest any other ways you could approach this?

What obstacles might keep you from reaching your goal? How could you remove them?

What have you done in similar situations in the past?

Continuing the example above developing an action plan for Goal 1, here's a sample dialogue with David illustrating how to develop options with the client.

Coach: What changes could you make to your prep process to help you find the author's single, main idea?

Client: First, using Church Fathers does not reliably help me focus. Move them to later in the process. Next, I could find one or two main exegetical sources to use that will help focus reliably. Also, a lot of times I don't trust myself to get it right. I need to trust that Spirit is guiding me to it. I could also make a formatted worksheet that guides me in the process rather than the emptiness of a blank page or empty screen.

Coach: At this point the client was slowing down and I had to push him, "Can you think of one more?" I let the silence hang for a good minute while he thought.

Client: Praying for God's guidance, instead of just stressing before God, so I can be a conduit.

The client seemed to be getting stuck at this point, so I returned to Exploration, to a point I flagged for follow-up. I asked: What do you do to figure out the author's flow of thought, his reasoning process?

Client: I read the context.

Coach: Then what?

Client: I ask who, what, when, where, how and why questions.

Coach: What do you do with the answers to those questions?

Client: I jot them down.

Coach: How might you alter this process to end up with the author's single main idea?

Client: I need more time to let that idea percolate. Is there a different kind of question to ask that will yield the author's idea?"

At this point the coach has a choice whether to move from an asking-stance to answer the question. Since the client had been working very hard, was feeling stuck and we were late in the session, I decided to offer an answer to the question.

Coach: You just asked "Is there a different question I could ask?" I've got a thought here if you'd like to hear it. Would that be helpful?

Client: Yes. Please.

At this point I described Robinson's structure of an idea: What's the author talking about? What's he saying about it?

Coach: Would you like to add that to your list of options? How would you state it as an action?

Client: I can explore Haddon Robinson's method for identifying the author's idea in a text.

This became option six on his list of options. Our time was nearly expired so I asked the client what he would like to work on before our next meeting. After a brief review of my notes documenting his options, he chose to move on his sixth option by purchasing the Robinson book and reading the chapter. This anticipated the next step in the funnel process.

Exercise 4: Decision.

Stoltzfus said of this next step, “Help your clients make a decisive choice to pursue a certain course of action that leads toward their goal. A useful framework is ‘Could Do > Want to > Will Do.’” The options are what coachees ‘Could Do.’ Next, ask for a decision on which potential solution they ‘Want To’ pursue, then close the deal by requesting a commitment to what they ‘Will Do’ to put their choice into action.”¹⁸ This clearly sets the stage for the questions the coach asks the client to narrow the focus in the funnel from options to action.

Coaching Questions:

Read the list of options to the client. “What stands out to you as options you COULD do?”

Which options do you WANT to pursue?

Which of these options will most effectively move you toward your goal?

Make a choice. What’s the best solution?

Here is what this exercise looked like “in action” with David on Goal 1. Having had time since our last meeting to procure the Robinson text, and review the chapter on analyzing the author’s idea, the client chose to focus on option six in our time together. In the course of his study he had come to the realization that, “this will go a long way to solve the problem of being unfocused in my study of the text. Those other options [options 1-5] are kind of nebulous, but this one is fundamental to the whole process.” He had chosen his option and was now ready to move to action.

¹⁸ Stoltzfus, *Coaching Questions*, 31.

Exercise 5: Action.

Stoltzfus described this final step in the Coaching Funnel: “Now we’ll turn the course of action the client has chosen into concrete steps with high buy-in. Clearly verbalizing what will be done creates both commitment and accountability.”¹⁹ The coach asks questions that help the client focus on the particulars of turning that decision into action, articulating actions that are specific, concrete, realistic, and measurable.

Coaching Questions:

Let’s turn that into an action step. What exactly will you do?

When will you do it?

What obstacles will we need to address before you move forward with this step?

Because sermon coaching often is very focused on the particulars of preparing and delivering sermons in a tight weekly or bi-weekly preaching cycle, a client will often choose actions to implement in the next sermon they preach. That is true of much of the coaching that follows. In it David was focused on his goals, working to achieve them in the context of his regular sermon preparation. That’s where our coaching conversations invariably went. With that in mind we join a conversation David and I had on his Goal 1: “Every sermon will have a single main idea that mirrors the author’s.”

Coach: Where would you like to go with that in our time together today?

Client: I’d like to try it out for my sermon this Sunday.

He was preparing to preach on Romans 6:1-11. He’d been reading and praying over the text for the last week, but hadn’t had much time to do any commentary work this week.

¹⁹ Stoltzfus, *Coaching Questions*, 31.

He reflected that this was actually helpful because it forced him to get “the backbone of the sermon” before reading what others say about the text. He had already prepared a subject and complement for the passage, and in the dialogue that follows we were able to focus and refine it.

Client: Here’s my subject: What is the relationship between a Christian and sin? And the complement is: 1) It is death and life, 2) baptism is symbol of that, 3) slave and free.

Coach: Correct me if I’m wrong, but I think I might hear TWO subjects: 1) ‘the relationship between a Christian and sin’ and 2) ‘this is who you are.’ Which would you say is the bigger? What’s more foundational?

Client: He’s saying, ‘This is who you are.’ Or to put it in form of a question: What is your identity in Christ?

Coach: Ok, that’s interesting. What’s he saying about that identity?

Client: In Christ we have a new relationship with sin: died to it and been liberated from it.

Coach: So what is the subject?

Client: This is your identity in Christ.

Coach: What’s the complement?

Client: You are to live dead to sin and alive to Jesus.

Coach: How do you put that together?

Client: Live like who you are: dead to sin and alive to Christ.

David seemed to have made very good progress on Goal 1 thus far. He then started thinking ahead to making a sermon based on this idea. He brought up the issue of baptism in the text and wondered about how to use that with his congregation. He confessed to going down a “rabbit trail” the day before, taking 20 minutes to research what Martin Luther said about the importance of baptism to his daily personal piety.

Recognizing the opportunity presented by this “rabbit trail” I drew a connection with this same concern he had identified earlier about Goal 1, being distracted by so many different ideas. We spent some time exploring that.

Coach: As you study your passage what do you do with those kinds of thoughts?

Client: I usually follow them. And waste a lot of time developing multiple ideas that then stress me out on Saturday trying to figure out how to use them.

Coach: What could do instead to keep yourself on task?

Client: I need a cohesive structure before I start jumping off left and right. I don’t want to lose these applications and illustrations, but I need to have a space to jot those ideas down so I can go back to them. I’ll save those things for later as I build the back-bone of the sermon.

Coach: How do you think you’d like to do that?

Client: I can keep a sheet of paper handy to write those down.

Coaching helped David evolve his action plan by drawing attention to obstacles and drawing forth solutions to these problems. Before we concluded the session I asked David to consider whether he wanted to move deeper on this goal, or move along to other goals.

Session 9 Move Down or Across?

After catching up with David at the start of the session, I offered him the choice of continuing to work on goal 1 (move down deeper on that) or moving across to work on Goal 2, or Goal 3. We can also review his last sermon, or work on your next sermon.

Coach: Which would be most interesting or useful for you? Or can you think of something else you'd like to focus on?

Client: I'm still pretty focused on Goal 1 at this point. I'd like to tell you about how my last sermon went and take a few minutes to review the work I've done so far on my sermon for this Sunday."

Coach: Where would you like to start?

Exercise 1: "Let's start with my previous sermon."

Coach: How did it go?

Client: I felt like the delivery was one of the best I've preached. My last few sermons have been duds and it's been discouraging. I feel like I needed a win and this sermon was a win. Things came together better than before.

Coach: What set you up for success?

David described at some length how he had taken a circuitous route getting there. He was behind schedule in his new prep process, delayed by one day. By the end of our session on Wednesday he had the idea roughed out and had the start of an outline. But then he got off on rabbit trails on Thursday. Took Friday off and had another stressed-out late-night on Saturday. Though he'd been trying to implement his new prep process, and finish sooner, he wasn't able to do that this time. On Saturday night, he was getting bogged down and frustrated. He was even doubting his own vocation. Then he reviewed his notes from our session on Wednesday and found his original idea and outline. "If I had just stuck to the process instead of getting stressed and following rabbit

trails I'd have been better off." Once he got back to basics (the sermon idea and outline) he could come up with a sermon because he remembered where he was going. Recalling the idea reduced his anxiety. "I just go back to it and say, 'Preach that. Preach that. Preach that.' That made it easier to choose which ideas and illustrations to go with. As I studied the text, the sub-points were just dropping onto the page. It's so clear."

This episode illustrates two valuable principles of coaching. First, change usually doesn't happen all at once. It takes time and repetition to unlearn old habits and create new ones. Second, small victories create big momentum. There's nothing like struggling and then succeeding to create a sense of confidence and eagerness for more. This experience exemplifies Lewin's four-stage feedback model for effective learning, often called the "action-reflection cycle." The cycle begins with an experience, which is then subject to observation and reflection. From those observations, the learner can abstract and generalize lessons learned, which can then be tested and applied in new circumstances. Critically reflecting on a learning experience is a crucial to gaining the greatest benefit from the experience. By asking probing questions and opening up new perspectives in a "learning conversation," the coach can help the client gain maximum learning from concrete experiences preparing and delivering sermons. Ultimately the client is "learning to learn" with the coach's help, and getting practice learning to ask those kinds of questions for himself.

Exercise 2: Refine your action plan to implement Goal 1.

With David's success on the action step he had chosen it was appropriate to take a step back and see if there were other actions he'd like to take for achieve Goal 1. I

reviewed the options he had named for Goal 1 and listed the actions he had taken so far, based on my notes from the last session:

1. Name the author's idea using Haddon Robinson's break-down of the structure of an idea.
2. Find one or two main exegetical/commentary sources to use that will reliably help focus on the author's idea. You mentioned using N.T. Wright's "For Everybody" and the ESV Study Bible because "They are succinct tools that give me the lay-of-the-land, without getting bogged down in detailed exegetical studies. That's more helpful at this point."
3. Make a step-by-step process checklist that guides him in the process rather than the emptiness of a blank page or empty screen.
4. And you will keep a sheet of paper to record "rabbit trail" ideas so you don't lose them or get distracted by them.

Coach: I'm curious about that third one. What do you have on that process checklist?

Client: Here's what I have so far:

- Do exegetical outline of the text.
- Summarize passage in my own words. Paraphrase.
- Investigate major questions in succinct resources like ESV study bible and N.T. Wright.
- State the author's idea.
- Expand the idea into a preaching outline with the main points and sub points that support the idea: what, why and how?
- Write the draft.
- Insert illustrations to make it come alive.
- At that point the conclusion will hopefully be laying there in front of me.
- Go back and make the most useful introduction.

Coach: That sounds like huge progress. Would you like to dig deeper into these other three action plan steps before we move on to your next agenda item?

Client: Let's work on the sermon I'm preparing for Sunday.

Exercise 3: Talk about Sunday's sermon.

Coach: Where are you in the process?

"I'm preaching on Romans 7. I've spent a lot of time this week trying to get the idea. It's been hard. It takes a lot of time to hammer it out."

On Wednesday alone he worked 5 hours on it. As a result, he had the main idea, the application points he wanted to make, the outline of "the key moves I want to make in the sermon," and he had a clear sense of where he wanted to end. When I commented on how squared away he was at stage in the process he said, "Since [the process] worked for me last time, I already feel more focused. When tempted to go off and read a book about the text, I keep coming back to the idea and the outline." David then talked me through his idea, laying out the subject and complement and how he combined those into a single idea. Though a bit clunky at this stage it was clear and coherent. He would continue to refine it on his own time.

David then walked me through the outline of his sermon. It was concise and coherent and had good transitions. In the terminology of David's second goal, he had already developed "a clear, coherent structure in which every point is summarized by a sentence". David clearly knew what moves he wanted to make in the sermon to inform, persuade and apply the central idea. Though we haven't yet developed an action plan for Goal 2 David was effectively fulfilling that goal. He felt good about putting his work down at the end of Wednesday afternoon, as he had planned, ready to pick it up and start writing on Thursday. At the end of this session I felt great encouragement at David's progress. I told my office administrator afterward, "I love this coaching stuff! I can have this huge impact on someone...and he's doing all the work!"

Session 10 - Time for the next Goal?

At the beginning of this session I asked “What would you like to work on today?” He named three topics: the sermon from the past Sunday, focus on Goal 3 (making effective illustrations), and review the other goals they’ve made. Having let the client set the agenda, I asked him to pick his priority. “What would be most helpful to do first?”

Exercise 1: “Review goals.”

Coach: What are your three goals?

Client: Idea. I’m focusing on Goal 1 the most, and it’s feeling like I’m making good progress.

Outline. I’m still struggling to meet that goal. I’m beating my head against the wall.

Illustration. I haven’t yet made the illustration guide.

After listing his goals, he immediately began reflecting on the sermon he had just preached. “This past Sunday I feel like the sermon was a success and a failure.” He explained that he had the idea, but did not get to a good outline until Saturday. It was a failure in the sense that it didn’t meet his goal of coming up with the outline on Thursday. The sermon turned out well, so it was a success, but he was still in a panic on Saturday “swimming in a swirl of different thoughts for where the sermon should go.” He didn’t solidify the structure of the sermon until very late in the game. As coach I was listening for significance and noticed that he repeatedly mentioned the outline of his sermon. And there was a lot of feeling associated with it. He felt it was a “failure” and he was “in a panic” over not having it. Following these signs of significance I asked, “So I hear you talking a lot about Goal 2. Would you rather focus on outlining, or on Goal 3?” He opted to dig in on Goal 2.

Exercise 2: Picture the ideal future and develop options to reach it.

Coach: What does your ideal outline look like?

Client: First, an opening illustration to segue into the text. When I'm writing the outline I'm not worried about introduction. I leave that blank. Second, a brief overview of the text and context, leading to the main idea of the sermon. Third, make points that highlight the main idea. But I'm having trouble taking the author's idea and turning that into preaching material for the congregation. It feels like I'm spinning my wheels.

Coach: Would it be fair to say that you are finding the jump from idea to outline too big for one leap?

Client: Yes, definitely.

Coach: What sort of intermediate steps do you think you could take that will make the outline flow more naturally? Or another way of asking it, What do your people need you to do as the preacher so they can "get" what the author is saying?

Client: I need to be submitted to the message. I need to be able summarize the sermon passage in 3-5 succinct sentences to be clear in my presentation."

Coach: OK that sounds like an outline, correct? How do you get from being submitted to having the outline?

Client: I need to focus on the application. Where do they need to be moved to? I need to make that clear.

David was working hard to come to this point. There were long silences as he thought, and multiple attempts to articulate what he was thinking. He stepped back from the process and reflected on it. "I feel like I'm stabbing in the dark here." I responded with encouragement. "You are doing great work. You are thinking. You are figuring it out. Thinking is hard to do isn't it? The genius of coaching is I'm not here to tell you what I think the answer is. I'm asking you questions that help you develop the answer yourself. Then you own it." Then to get us back on track I picked up the conversation where we left off.

Coach: What I hear you saying is once I have the idea, then I need to figure out how it applies to the people I'm preaching to. Is that accurate? Can you give me an example of that?

Client: This past Sunday I preached on Romans 12:9ff. Paul is telling them to do all sort of things, but it seemed like in our day and age that translates into trying to end [the congregation's] complacency. He's saying they are no longer living in a challenged sort of way. So the goal of the sermon is to get them to get off that complacency and take a first step to getting more involved in ministry in the church.

Coach: Great example. So what were you trying to do there?

Client: I was trying to help them see where that problem exists in their own life. It's a matter of defining it and helping them identify with it.

At this point I decided to switch from asking open ended questions to asking leading questions that suggested the answers, providing perspective for the client by naming the developmental questions explicitly.²⁰

Coach: Would you say it is a matter of explaining that meaning, drawing those connections so they understand it?

Client: Exactly.

Coach: Would you say it is a matter of persuading them that it's true of them?

Client: Yes.

Coach: Would you say it's a matter of helping them see what to do about it?

Client: Yes.

Coach: Ok, so what do you need to do to help your people "get" the author's idea?

²⁰ The Developmental Questions are in the fourth stage in Robinson's Ten Stages. See Prep Question 4 in Appendix C.

Client: But I always get distracted with so many thoughts and ideas swirling around in my head that distract me from that simple clarity. Or I get bogged down trying to craft the words, making clever phrases.²¹

Coach: So that is an ongoing struggle you've named. In light of that struggle what do you need to do as the preacher to help your people "get" the message?

Client: I need to focus on the ideas rather than the words.

Coach: What do you do with all those creative flourishes and word crafting when you are working on the ideas?

Client: I need to write it down in a short hand so I can come back to it.

Coach: To what degree have you been doing that for the last couple months?

Client: Not at all. I'm taking ideas and running with them and wasting a lot of time. But it was a turning point this past week when I was getting bogged down in the piles of books and all the things I was looking at to write the sermon. I just walked away from all the books and notes and took my one sheet of ideas and got down to it.

Coach: So it sounds like you are gradually changing your behavior, learning to catch yourself sooner in your old habits and switch to the new approach you are adopting?

Client: Yes. It's exciting.

David was struggling over how to translate the author's idea into a sermon outline. I had tried unsuccessfully to instruct David in the Developmental Question, using leading questions to present that material to him thinly-veiled as "coaching." Having only

²¹ In hindsight, I believe I rushed the process too much with these leading questions. In this exchange I essentially told the client what he should do, then asked him to repeat back what I had told him. That might be effective in a performing a single, simple task, but to deeply inculcate a pattern of thinking and behavior it is plainly insufficient. By suggesting it, I appear to have provoked a defensive reaction in David that is unhelpful to learning. Instead I should have asked the developmental questions instead, which would induce deep thinking instead of me telling him how to think. It would have taken longer but he would have learned it better than by me instructing him.

driven him to change the subject I tried another tack: go back to Sunday. I asked, “And how did it work out on Sunday?”

Exercise 3: A look at past Sunday

Coach: What was the idea from your text?

Client: Paul is showing that Christian community is characterized by life of sacrifice.

Coach: What did you need to explain to them so they could understand that idea?

Client: I explained what a life of sacrifice looks like and what it doesn't look like. I used illustration to show what life in community is and told story about my own life how complacency is the norm. I then demonstrated the effects of that complacency. I then tried to create a hunger to move beyond that. Then I tied it all up with Christ as sacrifice and how we follow where he leads and I asked people to not be afraid to reach out to shake off that complacency.

This new tack offered a second chance to coach David in exploring how to develop an idea into an outline. The quote above, once I transcribed it during our conversation, provided a goldmine for coaching David in a discovery of the Developmental Questions.

A basic tool of “active listening” is to reflect back what you have heard a person say.

This not only assures a person that they have been heard, it also is a powerful way for the coach to open up new perspective for the client. The segment of dialogue that follows shows how by identifying and reflecting back to him the underlying structure of his thought the coach is able to draw forth deeper insight in the client.

Coach: So I hear you saying you explained the meaning of sacrifice and community.

Client: Right.

Coach: Why do you think a preacher needs to do that?

Client: If people are going to “get” the message you have to explain the meaning of those things.

Coach: how often would you say we need to explain things in a sermon so they “Get” the message?

Client: All the time.

Coach: OK, so explaining things is something a preacher usually needs to do. How will knowing you must explain the meaning of important things get you closer to your outline?

Client: It would tell me what I need to explain, which would help me figure out what I need to include in the outline and where I would place that teaching.

Coach: It sounds like you also spent time showing them their complacency and trying to create a hunger in them to move beyond it, correct?

Client: Right.

Coach: Why do you think a preacher needs to do that?

Client: If they are going to “get” the message we have to convince and convict them of its truth and encourage them to change current attitudes, assumptions and behaviors.

Coach: OK, so that’s another thing a preacher needs to do, convince. How often would you say we need to make a persuasive case in a sermon?

Client: All the time.

Coach: How would figuring out what you need to convince them of get you closer to your outline?

Client: I could figure out the case I need to make and where to put that in the sermon to make the biggest impact.

Coach: And I heard you mention that you included material that would show them steps they could take to reach out and shake off their complacency?

Client: Yes.

Coach: Why do you think a preacher needs to do that?

Client: We have to apply it to their lives by suggesting how they can take steps to do it.

Coach: How often would you say we need to do that sort of thing to apply the message of a sermon?

Client: That'd me most every sermon.

Coach: So that's a third thing a preacher usually needs to do. How would figuring out what you need to apply in the sermon get you closer to your outline?

Client: It would help me figure out how I need to conclude the sermon with the point I need to drive home for them to do in the week ahead.

Coach: Our time is up. What do you think you will do with this in the next two weeks?

Client: I'll think about that and tell you next time we meet.

David had an action step for our next meeting.

Session 11 Developing Process to reach Goal 2

At the start of our session David was clear what he wanted to do. He had been thinking a lot about where we ended the last session and wanted to pick up where we left off. He described what he had been working on in the time between sessions.

Client: Based on our last conversation I've been reading Haddon Robinson and I'd like to put a finer point on the development questions. I've been wrestling with that a bit and would like to talk about it. Then I'd like to talk about how to turn that into an outline. I think it'll be easier to write the outline as I get better at the development of the idea. I really like the book and I want to use it as a hand-hold as much as possible. But I also want to own the process as something that fits my own quirkiness and style of development. I want to own it, not just cut and paste it.

In response, I reflected on how the coaching approach we've been using will be good for that. Having worked really hard to figure out how to bridge the gap between the author's idea and a sermon outline and having pieced together much of that framework from his own experience, facilitated by coaching questions, David was ready for a resource to flesh out his own thinking. If I had presented the Robinson book to David at the beginning of the process, his motivation to study and adapt the Robinson thought process would have been low. But at this point his motivation was quite high, as was his ownership of the resulting synthesis of his hard-earned work and Robinson's. Coaching powerfully promotes the adult learner's motivation and independence.

Coach: You've worked hard to develop your own priorities and approach here, and now that you've come upon the Robinson material you seem highly motivated to use it in your existing approach. As coach, I'm here to serve you in your learning process with questions that open new perspectives and possibilities. I want to help you articulate your values and ideas, and prompt you to generate action steps, make choices and move forward in the path of change. Occasionally, when you ask for it, I'll point you in the direction of useful resources, like Haddon Robinson's book. How is this working for you?

Client: It's really working great. I guess I see the method to your madness of asking those big questions and waiting for me to figure it out.

Coach: So where would you like to go from here?

Exercise 1: Exploring the Developmental Questions

Client: Let's return to the question, 'What does the congregation need for you to do so they understand what the author is saying?' Reading Robinson, it's clicking for me in a different way. I said last week I need to be passionately submitted to the message. I need to understand the point of the passage with a clear succinct summary. But once I do that now I'm trying to figure out how to communicate that to them. I've been working on explaining, proving and applying it.

Coach: What does it mean to do those things?

Client: Robinson asks 'Where is the overlap between the original audience and the contemporary audience.' I'm good on the explaining part. Next he asks, 'Is it true?' I see a danger for me of going too far, having a wrestling match in the pulpit.

Coach: Say more about that.

Client: Here's an example. Do 'all things' REALLY 'work together for good?' How do I take an enormous question and boil it down into a succinct answer without it sounding trite? Given my penchant for going off on rabbit trails this can be a real mine field for me.

Sensing that David was beginning to get off track from a potentially fruitful discussion I asked a perspective question to recall the topic we were discussing.

Coach: So at this point in developing your sermon are you getting into these debates, or are you just noting them?

Client: At this point I'm still just developing, not writing the sermon. I have these [developmental] questions written in my legal pad. But this week I'm going to type them out and have them as a guide for when I reach that point in the process. This will be more helpful than my usual process, which is stress and hope that something squeezes out. These questions will be sort of like conversation starters. Looking back at my last sermon it's only by God's grace that I had anything good to say because the process was so bad."

David was developing action steps to try out in the week ahead. He was integrating what he learned about the Developmental Questions into his sermon preparation process. In response, I offered perspective on the way he described trying to do in that last sermon. I observed that he already had these three steps implicit in that material, and coaching simply helped to make what was formerly implicit and haphazard (and stress inducing) into something that was now explicit. Through coaching he could now isolate and name these steps, and write them down on his checklist and intentionally follow them next time he plans a sermon. I asked about the impact asking these developmental questions on Tuesday, rather than Saturday, would have on his stress level. He just chuckled knowingly.

Exercise 2: Developing sermon objective

Reading ahead in Robinson's book, my client was intrigued by the idea of writing out specific objectives for the sermon, but he also met the idea with some resistance.

"That'll be hard for me to do, because I like to keep things fuzzy and vague."

Coach: What about "fuzzy and vague" appeals to you?

Client: Part of my upbringing in the church is everything was always made to fit. But that isn't necessarily the way things are. The edges are messier. I'd rather be hesitant about what God is saying than turn it into a trite phrase. Instead of a trite phrase I'd rather be the conduit by which the Holy Spirit transforms lives. [Preaching is] more of an event than dumping knowledge.

Coach: How do you see it as an event?

Client: It engages the mind and the heart, the whole person. Not just filling in the blanks in the sermon outline in the bulletin. But then I feel like I'm losing my effectiveness because I'm not going anywhere [with the sermon]. What am I making concrete? Is it a bit of information? Or am I trying to make engage the imagination with vivid imagery?

Coach: Are you seeing these as either/or choices?

Client: Well no. I guess I need to do all the above.

Coach: And how would you say the developmental questions and defining objectives for the sermon helps you do that?

Client: They break down the complex task of communicating into steps I can follow in a consistent way to communicate well. You know, looking back at the goals I made, I still like the goals, but I didn't realize how much unpacking was necessary to achieve them.

Coach: That path to accomplishing a good goal includes a lot of smaller action steps. Coaching helps a person translate goals into action steps, or as you say 'unpack it.' What kind of unpacking do you need to do to achieve this goal of developing an outline?

Client: To have an outline by Wednesday, I'm still not getting to that outline by Wednesdays. In order to get to that point I need to have these prior steps finished. I'll need to get really good at these steps and figure out when I need to do these steps on which days and estimate how long it takes.

Coach: How do you think you'll get really good at them?

Client: I think it's just going to be practicing it with intentionality, trying to establish a more regular process, forcing myself to stick to the process. That will help me improve my speed and efficiency.

Coach: I'm here to share that journey with you. Looking ahead, what would you like to focus on before we meet next time?

Client: I'm going to work on the developmental questions. I'll also try to develop the purpose statement of the sermon and see how my outline comes together."

David was figuring out all of this for himself. He was performing his own analysis, drawing his own conclusions, devising his own action steps, altering his own behavior, building new habits for himself. He was doing it all in a highly-motivated manner in pursuit of his own goals. I could have tried to tell David he needed to these things, but the effect would likely have been boredom, or resistance, or half-hearted effort leading to no permanent change. By taking an inquiring approach, coaching helped generate the exact opposite.

Session 12 Reaching Goal 2: Moving from Idea to Outline

The client had been boring into the second goal, developing his options for actions he could take to build a sermon outline. He has decided to use the Haddon Robinson stages for moving from the author's idea to a sermon outline. In the last coaching session he assigned himself the task of typing up the process and using it to prepare for his next sermon. We gathered in this session to check his progress with the process and his sermon preparation for the coming Sunday.

Coach: What would you like to do today?

Client: I want to talk about next steps in the process leading up to an outline. I feel like I'm really wrestling with the sermon. It's not easy, but if it's within the bounds of a process I feel like I'm moving forward and not just wandering around in circles. That's good. Also, it'd be helpful to review my work on the upcoming sermon on Philippians 3. Let's start with that.

Coach: Ok, what's the author's idea?

Client: Paul is talking about his goal in life. His goal (and ours) is to know Christ and the power of his resurrection."

Exercise 1: Develop the author's idea

Coaching questions:

What do you need to explain for them to understand the message?

What do you need to prove to them so they embrace the message?

What do you need to apply to them to make the message relevant so they can live the message?²²

Here are how those questions were put to use in the coaching conversation:

²² See Prep Questions, Appendix C.

Coach: What do you need to explain for your hearers to understand the passage?

Client: Paul does a lot of explanation in the passage, contrasting the Judaizers approach to his own. The people I'm talking to will need to get the background on who Paul is talking about. For [people today] it is not Jews but rather other ideas distracting Christians, things like materialism, consumerism, busyness and certain kinds of nationalism. In that context I need to explain the downward arc of the Christian life, following Jesus, in a world that emphasizes progress and the upward trajectory. Also, what does it mean 'to know Christ?' I'll also need to show what 'the power of his resurrection' means."

For each of these issues the client had a couple of sentences that summarized the material and described the beginning of his strategy to explain it to his people. I noted the good job he's doing, how clear and succinct his summaries were and how apt his strategy was to explain each of those concepts, to which he responded, "I feel good about it at this point."

Coach: What do you need to prove it to them? What case do you need to make to persuade them of the passage?

Client: I think people might ask 'Is it REALLY more fulfilling to follow Christ over these other things?' Paul obviously thought so. He uses himself as an illustration to persuade his readers. I could find a similar example of someone in American society who had it all and felt empty and turned to Jesus. The other area for persuading is the idea of the Christian life needing to share in Jesus' sufferings. 'How far does that really need to go?' Maybe that's an application.

Coach: I'd say that's a good segue to next question. What do you need to apply to them? How will you relate the message to their lives and the steps they take to live it?

Client: I'm wondering, what was Paul trying to get them to apply? Awareness. He wanted them to beware of the false ideas. He also wanted them to grapple with what it means to follow Christ. I think I could bring in later verse [not within the periscope] where Paul says, "Join in imitating me as I imitate Christ."

I commended David for what he had accomplished.

Coach: It is impressive how you are thinking this through and coming up with really clear direction. How does it feel to you?

Client: I am really enjoying this particular process. I feel much more like I'm engaging the text in a meaningful way that feels less like playing pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey and getting stressed. It feels like I'm more aware of what is going on and what the Spirit is saying to me in the passage, rather than worrying about whether I'm going to have a sermon. The process gives me something to lean on, knowing that it will lead me in the right direction. It takes a lot of pressure off of me. I don't have to do it on my own.

David's reflections speak eloquently to the usefulness of the planning process pioneered by Haddon Robinson, which he had been able to discover, learn, adapt and put into practice for himself through the coaching relationship. The coaching relationship began with the client expressing what is important to him in preaching and identifying areas where he would like to improve. Over time, the coaching process guided the client to turn those desires into goals, those goals into plans, and those plans into action. And the action became instructive and self-reinforcing. Nothing energizes like success. It was very exciting for both of us to take those early steps of action and to see the good outcomes that resulted. The client was motivated every step of the way because he had set the agenda and the pace himself. He was working on what was important to him, doing the hard work of thinking through his options, coming up with solutions, digging deep to meet the challenges he had set for himself, and savoring the progress he was making.

Coach: OK, so you've developed the idea, now what?

Client: Let's take the next step.

Exercise 2: Restate the author's idea for your sermon

Building on David's plan to inform, persuade and apply the author's idea it was now time to explore how that plan has changed the author's idea into a sermon idea suitable for his audience. David confessed, "I've been struggling with this." After working through several variations of the idea, using the coaching questions below, David ended up with this sermon idea: "Press on to the goal."

Coaching Questions:

How would you restate the author's ancient idea for your audience today?

How could you make that clearer?

How could you make that more concrete?

How could you make that more vivid?

How could you make that more concise?

How could you make that more memorable?

Exercise 3: Move from the sermon idea into a sermon objective.

David's challenge at this point was to state what "press on to the goal" would look like as the purpose of his sermon.

Coaching Questions:

What would you like to see change in your hearers as a result of it?

What do you want them to feel, think, and do different?

How can you make that more specific?

How can you make that measurable?

How will you know that they are doing that?²³

²³ See Prep Questions, Appendix C.

Here is what these sample questions looked like in actual use:

Coach: What is the result you want to see from your people hearing this sermon? What would “press on to the goal” look like in their life?

Client: They will be showing Christ’s humility.

Coach: How can you be more specific? Name one way they can “show Christ’s humility.”

Client: They will join Jesus on the downward trajectory of his life.

Coach: How can you make that measurable? What will that look like in their relationship with their child, or spouse, or boss?

Unfortunately, we ran out of time at this point in the discussion. David had some additional work to do coming up with a purpose statement for the sermon. The exchange above illustrates the difficulty preachers often have achieving clarity and specificity. It also demonstrates the power of coaching questions to facilitate a person’s deeper reflection and clearer articulation. Before ending the phone call I asked David, “What do you think you’d like to do next session?” He was eager to close the loop on this sermon and make sure he followed the process, so he opted to meet again the following week, instead of waiting for two weeks to reflect on the sermon he was preparing for Sunday.”

Session 13: Reaching Goal 2: Developing an outline.

After spending several minutes catching up on the latest in life since last we met, David articulated what he wanted to accomplish in the session: "I'd like to do an evaluation of the process I used to prepare my sermon last week, find some ways to fine-tune the process, and map out next steps to take in the next few months."

Exercise 1: Evaluate the Process

Coach: How did it go on Sunday?

Client: It was a very solid sermon. I felt good about what I presented and got some good feedback from people who don't usually comment on my sermons. But still I had some trouble with it because I need more time to figure out what is doable on a Sunday morning. When I'm editing it I'm always far too long and need to cut a lot back.

Coach: Did your sermon end up being too long?

Client: It was right on the border of too long. I was looking for an illustration that would show, not just tell, the conclusion. I didn't find one, and didn't have time anyway to include one if I found one. By the time I have a good opening to get people's attention and explain the passage and make it relevant, I'm out of time. My conclusion was fine. It just could have been better.

Coach: How do you see your sermon development process last week feeding into those results?

Client: It was very helpful. On Wednesday I was right on the cusp of writing the outline. Of all the sermons I've preached so far, the preparation for this one was much less stressful, the least unneeded anxiety. I went to bed at 11 on Saturday rather than at 3 a.m. When I stepped into the pulpit I felt a new assurance of what I'm doing. I didn't stand up there feeling 'This could be the worst sermon ever.' I felt 'This is coherent and prayed over and I can preach it with gumption.'"

Coach: On a scale of 1-10 how significant is that for you?

Client: This was 8 or 9 because I'm such a self-doubter it really helped me. A woman on the vestry said to my wife, 'It seemed like for the first time it's him. He's speaking from who he really is. He seemed so comfortable.'

Coach: How do you see the process you are developing for yourself generating that result?

Client: In the exegetical work I'm not going on rabbit trails. Now that I know what I'm looking for I'm able to get to the main idea of the text more quickly. The place where I was most hung up was getting to the outline. You were asking me lots of good questions to help me get more specific with my language. We got the idea and the developmental questions, and the purpose of the sermon. Then I got hung up on how to structure these ideas into an outline. I was looking at the different models Robinson has and decided to go with inductive-deductive structure. It just naturally fit with the flow of where I'm going. I'd love to write really good inductive sermons²⁴. I tried that with this one, but realized after an hour that I couldn't do it with this one, so I backed up and went with a more solid approach. The breakthrough for me was when I thought of the opening illustration. Since I already had everything else present as the framework for the sermon, when the illustration came to mind the pieces seemed to fall together very quickly."

Coach: The structural pieces?

Client: Yes. The opening illustration helped give shape to everything else. It felt like a really great creative process that combined the disciplined process I've been developing and the spontaneous, Spirit-led creative insight I'm always seeking. It's like I've got the loaves and fishes in my hand and now God" multiplies it. It's the Holy Spirit dynamic in it.

Coach: How is that different from the process you followed before?

Client: Before I would have gotten the opening illustration and then I'd try to write the sermon from it. And the sermon would wander because I didn't have a clear focus. I'd end up writing a few half-sermons because I didn't know where to go. This time the process created a healthy space in which to make the most of the illustration when it came to me.

Reflecting back on this "dilemma" theme from earlier discussions, I asked,

"Would you say that your new disciplined thought process facilitated your spontaneous creative process?" He said, Yes, exactly." That's a very strong evaluation of the process he had developed. Though he is struggling to devise and implement the process and get in the habit of following it, the process is yielding results. The contrast between his new

²⁴ Here is an example of Stoltzfus' practice of 'listening for significance.' This strong expression of desire and dream is an avenue for future exploration. It could be point for future goal.

prep process and old prep process couldn't be sharper. It was even getting to the heart of the dilemma he had experienced between Spirit-led spontaneity and rigorous planning. He had discovered that the latter facilitated the former. At this point I asked what he'd like to do next. He opted to move on to his next objective for this session.

Exercise 2: Fine-tuning the Process

A coaching approach assumes that the client is the expert in their own values, goals, needs, context, and capabilities. When David expressed his desire to fine-tune the process I asked, "Where do you see opportunity to fine-tune?" He responded by asking my opinion, "What do you think I should do? Focus more on structures of sermons?" Trusting him to be able to make up his own mind regarding what needed to be fine-tuned I answered his question with a question, seeking clarification.

Coach: How would you do that?

Client: Make [selecting a structure for the sermon] a natural part of my regular sermon prep process. I think there's a lot of room for growth in deciding what the structure is going to be. In this last sermon I was able to choose the structure, but my outline was mediocre.

Coach: What made it mediocre?

Client: Lack of specificity, clearly moving from point to point. I didn't have that in outline form. It was there in the sermon but not in an outline *per se*.

Coach: When did your outline emerge?

Client: Robinson's sample outline has Intro, point 1, point 2, etc. I just kind of bullet-pointed my ideas without being exact in my language. Once I got my intro I just started writing from there without specifying the subsequent points.

Coach: What did it cost you to skip the outlining step?

Client: It wasn't stress free and here's the point where I felt the most stress. The cost was more time and more anxiety.

Coach: Where did that time go?

Client: A lot of the time was in the editing part of the process. I had all the pieces on the table and when the intro illustration came to me and I wrote it out from there I had to go back and spend a lot of time tightening the language and cutting it down to proper size. I lost a lot of time not in wandering for a point to make, but in being effective in saying what was most important.

Coach: How would taking the time to make an outline saved you that time?

Client: I don't know. It seems like I'd rather write three half sermons rather than buckle down and write an outline.

Coach: What is it that you value about that old approach?

Client: Part of me wants to be an inductive preacher, because it's a compelling way to preach and I want people to think I'm a compelling preacher. I'm hoping that the light of epiphany will shine upon me.

What started as a fairly tentative discussion about fine-tuning his outline-writing process ended up exploring deeper and deeper into David's values, fears and motivation. The inquiring approach opened up very rich possibilities for self-reflection, discovery and transformation. After reflecting back what I heard David saying, I asked about the dilemma he had articulated in earlier discussions.

Coach: Can the Spirit work just as efficaciously in hours spent in process as he can in chasing down rabbit holes?

Client: (after a long pause) I've been operating out of the fear that a prescribed process will be a barrier to me owning the sermon. It'll just be three trite points and not really compelled by it internally. My previous approach held out the promise of owning it. But what I've discovered this past week is that fear is unfounded.

Coach: It sounds like what you experienced this past week is that the disciplined process is setting you up to make the most of the light of epiphany when it does shine, as with your opening illustration.

Client: That's right.

Coach: Great. It sounds like we are making a lot of progress here.

Client: We definitely are!

Session 14 Progress on Goal 3: Every sermon will have effective illustrations.

The coaching relationship will often deepen along the way, becoming more intimate and transparent, often broadening out from the narrow focus on preaching to embrace other issues. By opening each session with a broad question about where the client would like to go in the conversation, the coach opens the door to talk about wider life issues. This conveys care and facilitates connection, helps the coach to gauge mood and motivation level. It also opens the opportunity to deal with matters more pressing to the client than the established agenda, and deal with issues that might be distracting. The opening of this session illustrated that.

Coach: How have you been?

Client: I've been learning about myself.

Coach: What have you been learning?

Client: Seminary was a nice balance between academic work and communal connection with people. In parish setting I need more communal connection. It's less relational than I thought it was going to be. I'm working with children and youth and they're all in school. Their parents are more likely to talk to one of the clergy rather than me.

Coach: Would you like to talk more about that or pick up our agenda?

Client: Let's talk about my sermon this past Sunday. It was good overall. I've been thinking more about illustrations.

Coach: So I hear your interest in talking about your sermon this past Sunday and your recent work on Goal 3, illustrations. Which would you rather hit first?

Client: Let's talk briefly this past Sunday and process how the process went."

Exercise 1: Review the recent sermon.

Coach: How'd it go?

Client: The product ended up being good at the end. I went to bed on time on Saturday night. I didn't stay up stressing that night. But the manuscript didn't turn out like I wanted. It was half manuscript, half outline. At the 8 a.m. service things weren't as tight and crisp as they could have been. By ten I was able to work out the kinks. I don't want to use 8 o'clock for practice.

Coach: What happened with your process to yield that result?

Client: The reason I ended up with partially written sermon is because it was a busy week. By Thursday I was behind by a couple days and knew I'd not be able to finish. I knew then that I'd not have a full manuscript. I couldn't get into crafting the words, which I sometimes get stuck in. But it turned out well. My wife thought it was one of the better sermons I've preached so far. She said something happens when I'm not so reliant on the manuscript. There's a personability [*sic*] and connection that happens. The more extemporaneous style was good. It was a nice change. And it's good to know I can confidently do that. I also feel like I was able to convey the point of the passage well. I did get some negative feedback. Someone put a note in the offering plate saying, "SERMON WAY TOO LONG."

Coach: How long was the sermon?

Client: It was about 20 min. Usually they are 1700 words.

Coach: Is sermon length something you'd like to address in our time together?

Client: No. It's not really a problem at my church. The other clergy preach 15-20 minutes. It's normal.

Coach: Ok, well given the disruptions of the week were you able to utilize the phases in an efficient way?

Client: I was able to get through those things quickly up through the homiletical idea. But from that point the outlining process was slow and convoluted. I was struggling with multiple outlines again. On Saturday I finally just chose an outline did some cut-and-paste and put it away on Saturday night. Transitions could have been better. I was repeating myself.

Coach: So it sounds like under time pressure you reverted to your earlier approach to structuring the sermon?

Client: Yes. But in the end, the work I had done planning the sermon up to the homiletical idea put me in a good position to bring it all together and not stress about it on Saturday night.

Change comes in increments as the adult learner breaks old habits and builds new ones. The thought process David had developed and adopted was becoming progressively more habitual. It was taking over. This coaching exercised gave David the opportunity to notice that change, celebrate it and advance it further in his life.

Coach: That seems like huge progress! Anything else on that?

Client: No, we're good. Let's talk about illustrations.

Exercise 2: Focus on Goal 3.

To transition from our discussion of the sermon to illustrations we discussed how much his thinking on Goal 3, illustrations, had fed into his work on that sermon. He concluded, "Not much really" and then described his opening illustration, which led to a useful exploration of one of David's struggles with sermon illustrations.

Coach: How well do you think it worked?

Client: My challenge with illustrations is how much do I need to explain the point? Do I need to invest time in that or just let the illustration speak for itself? I have a tendency to over-explain things anyway. If I don't explain it I run the risk that they'll miss the point.

Coach: What would you say are characteristics of a good story teller?

Client: How they use the flow of their words, the non-spoken things that transition the hearer without telling them it's going to happen. They understand the emotion of what they are saying and convey that by the way they tell the story without telling them. So much of preaching is like story telling."

Coach: How does that relate to your craft as a preacher?

Client: The danger I see is that the story becomes more memorable than the point it is designed to illustrate. It is hard to know how to do that well. I want to be a good story teller but in a way that always keeps things pointing back to scripture. If I felt free to, I'd write a lot of sermons that enact what the text is saying. How do I do that without telling something that's not actually in the text there?"

The coach acts as a guide for the conversation, allowing it to move in new directions, but also keeping track of the overall arc of the discussion and bringing it back into focus. I attempted to do that, giving the client the choice of where to focus.

Coach: What would you say is the greater danger for you: that you would under-illustrate your sermon, conveying the propositional truth of the text but leaving it bare of illustration, or over-illustrating your sermon, stocking it with such rich and vivid illustrations that the text is obscured?

Client: My challenge isn't that my sermons are overrun with illustrations that conceal meaning of the text.

Coach: So I hear you saying that over-illustrating is not your problem at this point.

Client: Right.

Coach: So where would you like to invest our time together on Goal 3?

Client: Let's go back to the goal itself.

Coach: OK. Here's Goal 3: "Every sermon will have effective illustrations that pass the 'illustration test' which I will apply Thursday afternoon." You named some options for doing this: 1) Develop a measurement tool using Chappel's chapter on illustrations, and Robinson's, and 2) Listen to other preachers. Where are you on these action steps?

Client: I've been working through Robinson's chapter and thinking more about that. One helpful tool is the overlapping circles, [which illustrate] the overlap of my experience and the experience of my hearers. I'd like to implement that.

Coach: How would those circles apply to the illustration you used at the beginning of your sermon last week?

Client: It was easy to think this past week of grief as being a universal human experience. I haven't experienced it as deeply as many in the congregation, but C.S. Lewis gave some of that depth that people who have suffered more deeply

could relate to better than my own relatively limited grief. [Robinson] has got a few other ideas that are obvious safeguards in choosing an illustration. Is it true? Are you going to expand the details more than is warranted? Modesty: not elevating yourself. Does it violate a confidence? I also want to make sure that the illustration is zippy and it communicates the point in a real way. There's so much that goes into that.

Coach: Time is up. Where do you want to be on goal 3 next time we meet?

Client: I'd like to have a working draft of the checklist, melding both chapters from Chappel and Robinson. Next time I preach is the children's sermon on Christmas Eve. I'll need some really good illustrations for that, so this exercise is well-timed.

Exercise 3: Warm up the survey.

We were at the point in the course where we needed to start warming up the idea of conducting the second survey. The coach can begin by re-introducing the idea: "We had talked at the beginning of the course about doing a survey again at the end to gauge your progress."

Coaching Questions:

How do you feel about doing another survey?

When do you think you could do the survey sermon?

Do you think you'd like to keep the same survey instrument or edit it?

Do you think you'd like to use the same survey methodology?

We'll take some time in our next session to plan out the details.

Session 15 Achieving Goal 3

We were finally getting close to completing Goal 3. The client's action step from the last session was to compose his Illustration template, based on his reading of Bryan Chapell and Haddon Robinson. He completed that work and sent it to me a couple hours before our session. We took several minutes of opening conversation to connect and catch up from four weeks without meeting together. As coach I was able to gauge how he was feeling and what was important to him at this point in the week.

Coach: It looks like you did good work on your Illustration Test.

Client: Yes, I studied Chapell and Robinson, took notes on their chapters, and tailored that material to what would fit best for me.

This is a good illustration of the benefit of coaching. A didactic approach to learning might seek to provide that content to the learner, telling him what he needed to have on that checklist. Then it would be on the teacher to do the work of producing the check list. But even then it might miss the mark in some important ways by not speaking specifically to issues that the preacher struggles with. In addition, in a lecture or advice giving format, adequately conveying and capturing all that information is time consuming. In contrast, the coaching approach assumes the client is the expert of his own life. If he's motivated to improve he can figure out how, efficiently choosing what will be most helpful in his circumstance to move forward. A teacher could throw lots of darts on the board with suggestions for the learner and still not hit the bulls-eye. The coach lets the learner take aim on his own problems because he's able to be much more accurate.

Coach: So what would you like to accomplish in our session today?

Client: I'd like to review [the Illustration Test] out-loud, verbalize what's been in my head. It'll help me to hear back from you how well you think it fits me. Also I'd like to know if I'm missing anything."

After reflecting back to him what I heard he'd like to accomplish we got into it.

Exercise 1: Review the Illustration Test

Coach: Before we get into this document, how are you planning to use this?

Client: Until it becomes habitual, I plan to have this printout of these questions next to me when I'm working on the sermon. Once I've finished stages 1-8, I'll use this when I start fleshing out my outline using the sheet of illustration ideas I've been writing down to keep me from getting distracted. I'd like to run those different illustration ideas through this filter to find out which illustration is best for where I want to fit it in."

This seemed like a good time to picture the ideal future. I say: OK so let's picture you using this. You've got your outline with major moves, and your sheet with illustration ideas scribbled down. Now you get out the sheet. What do you do? He said, "I go through it step by step with my illustration ideas."

- 1) How does this illustration directly connect with the Main Idea of the sermon? Or does it support a sub point, emphasize a main point, personalize an application, create a crisis, etc?
- 2) What is this Illustration's "level?" (Robinson, Biblical Preaching, p. 112)
 1. Illustration: from **my lived** experience that overlaps the **listener's lived** experience.
 2. Illustration from my **learned** experience that overlaps the **listener's lived** experience.
 3. Illustration from my **lived** experience that overlaps the **listener's learned** experience.
 4. Illustration from my **learned** experience that overlaps the **listener's learned** experience.

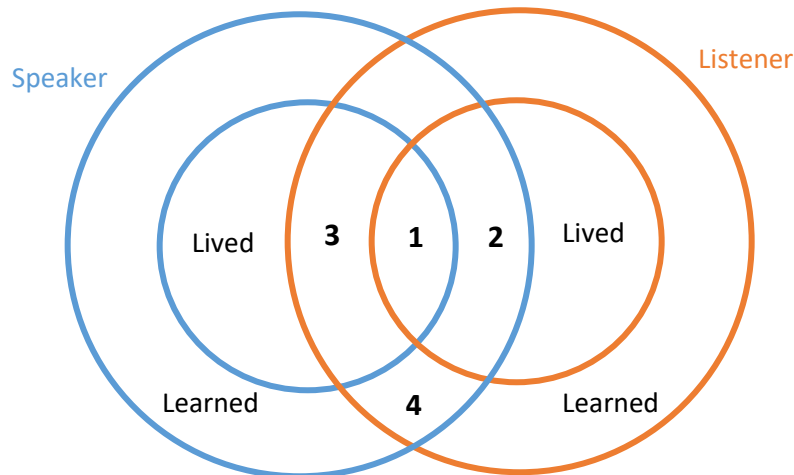


Figure 7. Shared and Learned Experiences Model

- 3) Does it have vivid and pertinent details? Can the reader see it with their inner eye? Can they feel it? Bland illustrations are bad illustrations.
- 4) Can the word choice can be shifted to align the language of the illustration with the Key Terms found in the sermon? Don't waste a word!
- 5) Is it brief? A working rule of thumb is that no one illustration should be more than 5 minutes (3 minutes?) in length. More illustration means less scripture.
- 6) Is this illustration true or have I falsely enhanced it in any way?

As we went through the steps of the Test I asked clarifying questions where needed

and client edited on the fly. In the end it was clearly well-tailored to his priorities and the challenges he faces as a preacher. I could see that nothing was missing. When we were finished working through it I asked,

Coach: How has this exercise been helpful for you?

Client: I had previously hoped to use my internal skill as a preacher and the Spirit's guidance to intentional and analytical about what I'm choosing to say and choosing what not to say. My time is limited. There's not enough time to say what I want to say, so I have to be disciplined about making those choices well. This Test helps me do that.

I followed my curiosity and the client's signs of significance.

Coach: What does the necessity of limited time force upon you?

Client: It forces me to be more concise and precise in my language. It forces me to really know my stuff. On the negative side, this whole pressure of time is my biggest stress. I'm trying to disabuse myself of the expectation of the twenty-

five-minute sermon. I need to figure out what to say in fifteen minutes and how to say it well. This illustration tool and the other stages helps me sift through my options and isolate things that are most important, sooner, so I'm not flipping out about it.

Coach: What benefits do you see to that?

Client: These tools help me shut off the stress, and that allows me to be more sensitive to what God is doing in the process. God is helping to connect them. I feel more Spirit-led when I'm not stressed.

Seeing a connection to a concern the client articulated in an earlier session I offered some perspective:

Coach: It sounds like you are experiencing a resolution of your earlier concern about having to choose either good process OR being Spirit-led. It sounds like the process is actually enhancing your sense that this is Spirit-led.

Client: Yes, I can see that. But there is still some tension there for me.

Coach: Is that something you'd like to explore further or does this feel like a good time to transition to the next topic?

Client: I'm good on that. You wanted to talk about the survey?"

Exercise 2: Survey Prep

Coach: Have you had opportunity to think through questions related to the survey?

Client: Yes, I reviewed original survey instrument and I'm very comfortable with what's on there. My original letter and invitation process worked well for inviting my group of people to evaluate the sermon. I'll change the language of the letter to reflect the different situation. Invite the same group. I have a date, January 4.

Coach: Ok, great. How about we meet the week after results.

Final Stage Sessions

At this point in the program we return to a prescribed format to bring the coaching course to a formal close after approximately one year. Two tasks remain. First, the client will conduct and evaluate the final sermon survey. Second, the coach will

conduct an exit interview with the client to assess the progress made in the course and the client's reflections on the relationship and the results. The option remains to continue the coaching relationship after this point, but this is the end of the period of time the coach and client agreed to in their Coaching Agreement. Instead of continuing the verbatim account of sessions with client "David" in this section, I have provided just the goals, rationale and coaching questions. Each client's input, including David's, from this point on is summarized in chapter five, which evaluates the effectiveness of the program. These steps in the final stage have been divided into discrete exercises, which the coach can fit into the flow of discussions with the client, as appropriate, as the coaching course draws to a close.

Exercise 1: Coach the client toward the survey

As the coaching course draws to its conclusion, the coach will need to draw the client's attention toward the survey. Depending on the client the motivation level will likely vary so the coach might need to be prepared to get the client's motivational juices flowing to exert the effort necessary to successfully conduct the survey.

Coaching Questions:

What was helpful to you in conducting the survey at the beginning of the course?

Review instrument. Are there changes you'd like to make?

How did you conduct the survey last time?

Is there anything you'd like to do differently?

Exercise 2: Discuss survey results.

After the client conducts the survey, the results are then organized and analyzed. The process works much as it did for the first survey. The coach can start broad, exploring how well things worked the Sunday of the sermon, then focusing in more specifically on people's responses to the survey.

Coaching Questions:

Did you experience any logistical issues with administering the survey worth reviewing?

How did the sermon feel to you?

What are most people saying in the quantitative section? What patterns do you see?

Where did you see most favorable responses?

Where were people less-favorable?

Did anything stand out in people's responses to the qualitative questions?

How many people successfully named the main idea?

How many people identified the action you were urging them to take?

What patterns do you see in people's responses to the other questions?

Exercise 3: Compare the first and second surveys.

Depending on the sample size of survey respondents this can be a labor-intensive task. It is most efficiently done if the client uses a spreadsheet to collate and calculate the data from the quantitative portion of the survey. Such spreadsheets can often generate graphs that offer very helpful visual representation of the survey results (see chapter 5). That is especially useful when comparing results from two surveys. I

have developed an Excel spreadsheet template for this survey instrument that includes the respective fields and formulas to handle the data from the surveys. The client simply inputs people's response data and the spreadsheet does the rest. To analyze the qualitative data, the client reviews people's written responses once, noting general categories that emerge. The client then reviews the material a second time tallying how many people gather under each category, highlighting particularly useful or illuminating phrases in people's input. These tasks are made much simpler if the client is willing to take the time to write out, verbatim, all comments under each question in a single document.

Coaching Questions:

Where do you see improvements over the first survey?

How do those improvements line up with your goals?

How helpful was it doing the survey again?

Exercise 4: Exit Interview

The surveys seek to gather the congregation's perspective on client's preaching improvement. The view from the pews is vitally important. The client's perspective on the process and results is also crucial. Ultimately, the client's subjective sense of skillfulness and empowerment, and progress and hope for more-to-come is even more important, because those fuel confidence and joy and momentum. In the final session of the Sermon Coaching Course we test the effectiveness of the time the client has invested with the coach and try to gain a sense of their well-being going forward.

Coaching Questions:

Ask about impressions of the coaching approach:

What have you enjoyed most from our interactions over the last year?

What was most helpful about my style of serving you? What seemed distracting or unhelpful?

Which aspects of the coaching have seemed new or unfamiliar for you?

How effective were you in defining goals, translating them into action, and making changes?

On a scale of 1 to 10 how did our time together focus on what's important to you?

Ask about the effectiveness of the program as a whole:

On a scale of 1 to 10 how valuable was this course for you?

What aspects were most helpful?

What would have made it better?

How have you changed your sermon preparation?

How have you changed your sermon delivery?

From congregational surveys where did people see the most progress?

Ask about how much of Robinson's Ten Stages the client assimilated:

What new perspectives, concepts, techniques or information did you gain about preaching?

What questions do you ask and answer to get from scripture text to completed sermon?

How do you think those changes happened?

What areas of your preaching would you like to work on more in the future?

What will you do to achieve improvement goals after our coaching process ends?

How would you describe sermon coaching to your clergy colleagues?

Chapter Summary

This chapter has described the process of providing sermon coaching to a client, from the prescribed steps the coach can take to begin the coaching relationship, through a verbatim account of a coaching relationship with “David,” to prescribed exercises for concluding the course. Building on chapter two, this account has illustrated the mindset, skills and techniques a Christian coach can use to help a preacher define and achieve his goals to improve the preparation and delivery of sermons. In dialogue with the theoretical work in chapter three, this chapter has exhibited how the Sermon Coaching Course puts the insights of behavior change, adult learning, and Evocative Coaching method to work in real life. It is intended to serve as a roadmap for coaches who desire to work with preachers, by suggesting how the coaching relationship might unfold. This chapter has demonstrated that it can be done. We turn now to chapter five, to evaluate the effectiveness of this coaching course for “David” and four other coaching clients.

CHAPTER FIVE

OUTCOMES

This thesis project argues that a coaching approach will help preachers improve. To test the validity of this thesis I gathered a research group consisted of five “human research test subjects,” all currently active preachers, who volunteered to participate in this study. The research involved a real-world field experiment with these clients in which I conducted the coaching activities described in chapter four over a period of approximately one year with each client. To evaluate the effectiveness of the experiment, I used both a pre-test and post-test design, and a case study descriptive approach. The pre-test and post-test design took the form of surveys to gather qualitative and quantitative responses from the preacher’s audience at the beginning and conclusion of the coaching course. The value of the survey approach relies on the supposition that the preachers’ improvement will be noticeable to the people in the pews, as indicated by their responses to the surveys taken before and after the coaching course. The case studies involved careful observation of each client through the coaching course, as they engaged in the process of reflection, goal-setting, planning and taking action to meet their goals in the midst of their different ministry contexts. In this process, I served as a participant/observer conducting the coaching course with the client and observing and recording the results.

Three clients initially joined this research group in response to an invitation issued at a clergy retreat of the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia, in the Fall of 2012. Two

others subsequently heard about it by word of mouth and self-selected as participants. Their names, for the purpose of this research, were Ann, David, Mark, Anne, and Kate. Three finished the course (Ann, David, Mark) and two declined to complete it (Anne, and Kate). As described in chapter four, the coaching course assumes the shape of the coaching funnel. Early on, the coach gathers information from the client about her life, ministry and preaching in the context of her church. Gradually the coaching process helps the client distill that mass of information into goals for improvement, and then into plans to achieve those goals, and then funnels those plans into action. Along the way, the coach is looking for signs of improvement, to help facilitate momentum for further change, as well as to evaluate the effectiveness of the coaching course.

The pages that follow describe each client and his or her participation and growth in this research study, narrating the goals each set, and the steps they took to fulfill them. I will evaluate their progress using 1) the comparative results of two sermon surveys they conducted at the beginning and conclusion of the Sermon Coaching Course, 2) evidence of improvement noted throughout the course, and 3) the client's feedback gathered in a semi-structured exit interview at the conclusion of the course.

Client 1: Ann

During the coaching course, Ann was in her mid-to-late 50s, and had been the pastor of her small (Average Sunday Attendance: 42) urban parish for 11 years when we began our coaching relationship. We connected well in our initial conversations, and

were open in sharing our personal stories. Ann identified some significant challenges and victories and ongoing struggles as she shared with me, which helped deepen our trust and understanding. She was preaching every week, except on occasions when she is able to invite a guest preacher. She expressed that she likes to preach, believes she has a good message that she wants to spread, loves doing what she does on Sunday mornings, and gets good feedback on sermons. Her overall message about her preaching was, “You can trust God to be there for you, actively working on your behalf.”

In our initial coaching sessions Ann described in detail her process of preparing sermons and expressed a number of frustrations with her process. I was alert to “signs of significance” in what she said, which indicate her passions, dissatisfactions, challenges and ambitions to improve. These became the substance of her future goals. From those sessions emerged a wide array of issues she wanted to address.

Goal 1: Include more stories in the sermon from personal life and the newspaper.

Goal 2: Focus on a part of the passage to dig into it, rather than just retelling the whole story

Goal 3: Shorten prep time.

Goal 4: Incorporate a wider range of facial and hand gestures in the presentation

Goal 5: Try preaching without notes, to make more eye contact with the congregation.

Goal 6: Try doing a sermon series on a topic.

Goal 7: Make more time to study the text, asking the right questions to get the idea for the sermon on Tuesday before going to the commentaries on Wednesday.

Goal 8: Try to preach different literary genre, rather than just preach the Gospel stories.

She transitioned easily to the survey in Session 4, and accepted the survey instrument as-is. She expressed some trepidation about eliciting the feedback she might receive, but concluded that “I want to preach well, and only [the congregation] can tell me what they like and don’t like.” She was willing to take the risk to improve her preaching. Ann conducted the survey on May 5, 2013 and received twenty-six response forms from the forty people present that morning. The results of the survey made it clear that Ann’s congregation viewed her favorably and was eager to affirm her. Nearly half of respondents (12) gave all 4s or 5s in the quantitative section. The results are summarized below.

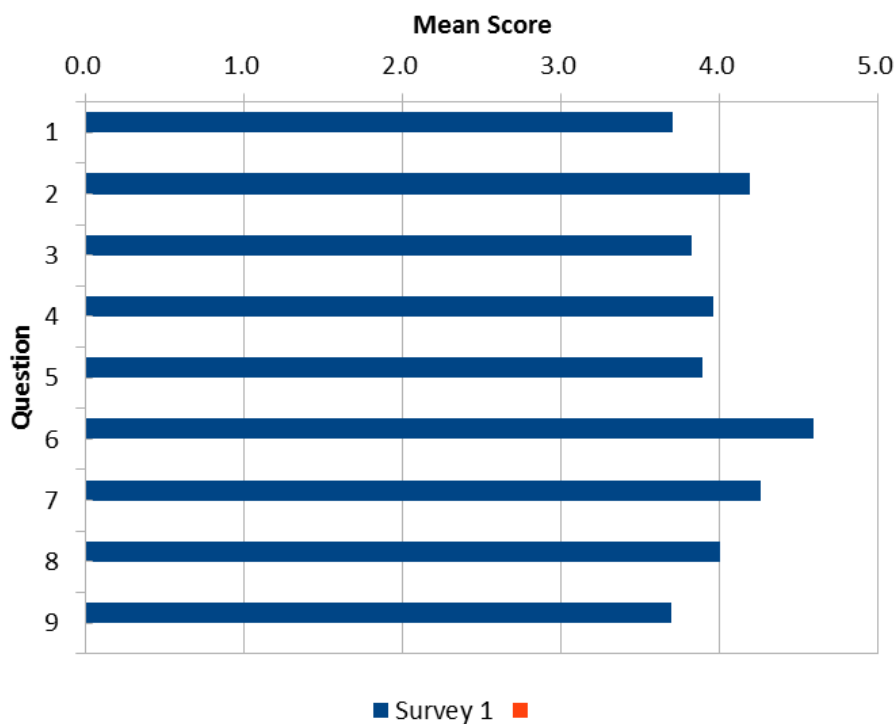


Figure 8. Client 1, Survey 1

The preacher's sincerity received the strongest affirmation. Eighteen people marked 5 to show they strongly agree" with the statement, "The preacher believed what he was saying and was passionate about it" (question 6). Following closely behind that, thirteen respondents strongly agreed that "the introduction grabbed my attention" (question 2) and that her "choice of words was clear, personal and direct" (question 7). On the next tier of affirmation ten respondents strongly agreed that she "effectively illustrated" the sermon (question 5), and nine said the same about her "eye contact across the congregation" (question 8).

People's responses became more ambivalent to the statement, "The plain meaning of the Scripture was made clear" (question 4). That statement received the highest number of people choosing 4 (13). The remaining responses were roughly split between "strongly agree" (7 people selected 5) and people who didn't agree (6 people selected a 1, 2 or 3). Then there were three areas on the survey where responses were more negative, as indicated by one third of respondents (9 people) choosing 1-3 on the Lickert Scale. The first was the statement "The preacher effectively communicated a single, main point" (question 1), which nine people disagreed with that. The same number of people were similarly doubtful that the organization of the sermon being "easy to follow" (question 3), and the preacher's gestures and facial expressions being "appropriate" (question 9). That last statement elicited three comments in the margins of the quantitative section of the survey that her gestures seemed "awkward" and "contrived."

To summarize the feedback from the quantitative section, people clearly affirmed Ann's sincerity as a preacher, the effectiveness of her introduction and word choice, and her use of illustrations and eye contact as a communicator. People sensed that she was less effective at presenting the meaning of the scripture passage she was preaching, and was not as successful communicating a single main idea, conveying a clear structure of thought, or using facial expressions and gestures to communicate it. People's written response in the qualitative section reinforced this feedback.

One interesting feature stood out in the written responses of the qualitative section. Ann received a lot of written feedback, both positive and negative, that aligned well with her goals, as they had begun to surface in previous sessions. The first goal she had articulated was the desire to "put more stories in the sermon from personal life and the newspaper." She was intentional about including an illustration for every point in the sermon. She had said, "I don't usually do that," but tried it in this sermon and seven people noticed and named it as "the greatest strength of the sermon." The second goal she had articulated was to "be able to focus on a part of the passage to dig into it in the sermon, rather than telling the whole story." And in this sermon she succeeded, as one respondent noted the greatest strength of the sermon was "It did not rely too much on repeating the Gospel reading or on commentary writings." The explicit reference to the commentaries is significant, because Ann's last goal was to become less reliant on commentaries. Even in the area of hand gestures, where Ann came in for her most often-voiced criticism that Sunday, one person observed that "the hand gestures are getting better" and one thought that her hand gestures were the greatest strength of

the sermon. Ann's forth goal was to "Incorporate a wider range of gestures into the presentation, moving my hands, etc." Having made this goal, she was working at it, awkwardly perhaps, but many people observed the difference, some favorably.

The negative feedback also aligned well with Ann's goals. Several noted that she read the sermon, as one said, "like a lecture." Ann had anticipated this in her fifth goal: "Try preaching without notes, to make more eye contact with the congregation." Lack of coherence was a theme in four people's comments. One said, "I find it difficult to tie the ideas together. Ann introduces lots of different ideas on each point. I would find it helpful to have fewer points and more tying together." This particular comment best substantiated Ann's original analysis. It focused her attention and helped her to elevate Goal 7 ("Make more time to study the text, asking the right questions to get the idea for the sermon") to the top of her agenda in the months ahead. By the time of the first survey, Ann was already improving her preaching and people were noticing it. One person said it succinctly, "Ann is improving." Another said this sermon was, "one of your best sermons." It is notable how Ann's preaching had already begun to improve so early in the coaching process. What caused that change?

As we saw in chapter three, Alan Deutschman identified three keys to change: relate, repeat, reframe. First "you form a new, emotional relationship with a person or community that inspires and sustains hope," that "makes you believe you have the ability to change."¹ As we will see from Ann's exit interview, the coaching relationship

¹ Alan Deutschman, *Change or Die: The Three Keys to Change at Work and in Life* (New York, NY: Regan/HarperCollins, 2007), 14.

was very influential for her moving to make changes. Second, “the new relationship helps you learn, practice and master new habits and skills.” The evidence presented above shows that by articulating her goals, Ann was already moving in a concerted way to “learn, practice and master new habits and skills” as a preacher, with noticeable results. Third, “the relationship helps you think of new ways of thinking of your situation and your life.” The process of inquiry we had begun enabled her to look closely at her experience, values and performance, and reframe these by articulating goals to make improvements. I would like to highlight, in particular, the evident effect of setting goals. Just by articulating her intention to change, in the form of goals, Ann was able to move into action to make those changes. The survey responses give direct evidence that Ann was able to begin making progress on at least five of those goals, which was noticed and mentioned by survey respondents.

Refining and Implementing Goals

Coaching follows the priorities of the client. After the survey, the next step of the coaching course, is to refine the goals with the input received from the congregation and make them “SMART.” Next, we would prioritize them and develop a plan to achieve each goal. That was not Ann’s priority. Once we validated her goals from the survey, she was much more eager to get to work on her sermons than refine the goals. Knowing that “The best time to learn anything is when whatever is to be learned is

immediately useful to us,”² we went with her priority and got right into sermon coaching. That set the pattern for the rest of the course. Ann and I never got into the step of deliberately making her goals “SMART.”³ They just evolved over time, as we will see. That is not to say she was unconcerned about using her goals. She was very focused on her goals and made great use of them through the course. In fact, at our one-year-after interview, she still had her goals at the forefront of her mind and was diligently working them into her preaching week by week.

Starting with Session 6 on May 22, after we had reviewed the results of her survey, Ann wanted to get right to work on the upcoming sermon she was preparing. She pursued Goal 7, trying to focus in on the point of the passage, the “money phrase” and then translate that into a point of her sermon. I used the coaching questions derived from Inductive Bible Study and Robinson’s 10 stages (Prep Questions 2 and 3), to help her articulate the point of the passage. She was surprised by how much good material she came up with that session. At the end of the session, I asked, “What was helpful?” She said, “I don’t ask questions like this. I need to learn to ask these questions. They help me find a single point for the sermon rather than try to cover six points. I’d like to find a line or two to develop more deeply. I want to work on that more next time.” That’s exactly what she did, session after session.

² Goodwin Watson, cited in Knowles, Holton, Swanson, *The Adult Learner*, 88.

³ Viewing Ann’s approach through the lens of the change theory presented by Prochaska, Norcross and DiClemente, we could say that Ann was very quick through the Contemplation and Preparation stages of change and ready to move to action.

Initially, she wanted me to ask “those questions” that help exegete the passage and get at the author’s idea. However, by July 3 she was asking those questions on her own, coming to our appointment with answers prepared. She said in that session, “I have the starting point, but how do I move from there? How do I flesh out the text?” This set up the opportunity to ask her the developmental questions (Prep Question 4) that helps the preacher think through how she will need to inform, persuade and apply the point of the sermon. After she worked her way through these questions with regard to her passage, I asked her what she thought of them. She said, “This is helpful because I can ask these questions of any text. They help me exegete the congregation.” She had it right. By September, she was asking the developmental questions herself in her Tuesday preparation and coming with her answers prepared to our Wednesday appointments.

On September 4, we conducted a progress review. She was pleased by how powerful Prep Questions 2-4 were in helping her achieve her goals. She was generating a lot more material in her own study of the text on Tuesdays and was consistently able to stick to one point in her sermons. When she turned to the commentaries on Thursdays she was much less dependent on them (Goal 7). She was “reading selectively” because she had “already made up my mind on many issues.” This has shortened her prep time (Goal 3). In that session, we reviewed the material she had developed for the coming Sunday and I asked a version of Prep Question 6: “Think of some people in your congregation and describe what difference this sermon will make for them.” By the end of the session she had developed a very clear goal for her hearers

and had articulated a homiletical idea that was simple, clear and vivid: “A disciple must hold everything with open hands, ready to let go and receive.”⁴

We ended that session with me admiring the progress she had made. I asked, “What would you like to focus on next time?” She was ready to move on to other goals, focusing on using more stories as illustrations and preaching other genres in the Bible. In the sessions that followed on September 18, October 2 and 16 she was focusing on the application of the message, exploring how to illustrate with stories from her own life and current events (Goal 1). I was able to use questions from Prep Question 9, but mostly it was a matter of asking more general questions like “What would that look like?” and “How have you experienced that in your life?” and “Where is that an issue in our world today?” On October 16, Ann reported the good effects, “People like it when I talk about myself,” and also noted that she was feeling more free with her hand gestures (Goal 4). She also shared her plan to preach an Epistle passage in November (Goal 8). We planned to work on the Thessalonians passage in our next session.

Ann had been heavily reliant on narrative preaching from the Gospels and felt daunted by the prospect of wading into the more abstract, “less-storied” Epistle literature. However, her confidence had grown to the point where, in our November 6 session, she believed she could take it on. And she didn’t start slow. The passage appointed in the lectionary was a piece of apocalyptic from Thessalonians. Instead of coming with the answers to the questions already prepared for this passage, we worked

⁴ It illustrates the David Rock and Linda J. Page’s idea of neuroplasticity in *Coaching with the Brain in Mind: Foundations for Practice* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2009), 185.

our way through them together in the session and she came through it beautifully. At the end of our session she shared her determination, “use an outline in composing the sermon. I’d like to talk about it in our next session.”⁵ At the end of that session, I stepped out of the coaching approach of asking questions to introduce a concept important for outlining the sermon. I described the difference between a deductive and inductive approach to organizing the sermon. She said she’d think about that.

When we met next, on November 20, she reported developing outlines as she prepared the last two sermons and found that, in the process of thinking about the structure and movements of the sermon, she was able “to switch up the usual order of the sermon.” This was a consistent theme in early discussions of where she’d like to improve her preaching. She expressed a sense of being bored with using the same structure for her sermons and wanted to explore some variety. In our discussion on December 4, I asked her to think about other ways in which outlining was helpful to her sermon preparation. When we met again the following week, on December 11, Ann described the difference it had made. “On Thursday morning I read and pray over all my notes, and the illustrative stories I’ve gathered and go from there. The outline helps me know where I’m going next and how much material I have and where it fits together. It gives me a path to follow and it’s very helpful to write down the order that I’m going to talk about things in. It helps to put pen to paper like this before I put hands to

⁵ It is a point of significant interest that Ann was progressing logically through the Ten Stages, taking the next natural step by outlining the sermon. Her independent discovery offers confirmation that Robinson’s Ten Stages are not merely a “technique” but an inherent structure of thought.

keyboard.” Ann had discovered for herself the benefits of making an outline in the process of sermon preparation.

Measures of Improvement

This section reviews the progress Ann made during the coaching course, the results of the final survey, and her reflections in the exit interview. These different lenses help both coach and client evaluate the client’s improvement and the coach’s effectiveness and to gain a more nuanced, in-depth understanding.⁶ These three lenses offer coach and client opportunities for self-assessment, which can serve as a basis for ongoing learning and improvement. During the coaching course, Ann made significant progress in achieving several of her goals. She focused most on Goal 7, deepening her study of the scripture text, asking the right questions to discern the author’s idea for the sermon. Gaining facility in studying the text ended up helping her “dig into a passage” (Goal 2) and “shorten prep time” (Goal 3) by helping her study in a more focused way that generated more material and made her less reliant on commentaries. She worked hard and made progress on Goal 1, including more illustrations from personal life and current events. Telling more personal stories seemed to help her be more expressive with her gestures (Goal 4), and make more eye contact with the congregation (Goal 5). She also began to experiment with preaching on different genres, dipping into the book of Isaiah and Paul’s second letter to Thessalonians. Though it was not among her

⁶ See Wlodkowski Strategy 52: “Provide opportunities for adults to demonstrate their learning in ways that reflect their strengths and multiple sources of knowing,” in *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn: A Comprehensive Guide for Teaching All Adults*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 329.

original goals, Ann began outlining her sermons as part of the preparation process. These results were clear to coach and client during the coaching course. How clear were they to the congregation?

Ann conducted her final survey for the sermon she preached on January 26, 2014. She was disappointed both with her own performance with the sermon that morning, and the fact that she received only half as many responses as previously. Of the forty-four people present, twelve responded to the survey. “It was not my best sermon,” Ann said, “I had to do lots of explaining.” One person agreed, writing on the survey form, “you have had much better sermons than this one. This one was not up to your usual.” Most of the twelve respondents shared her self-critique, responding slightly less enthusiastically than in the first survey. The quantitative responses from both surveys are graphically represented below.

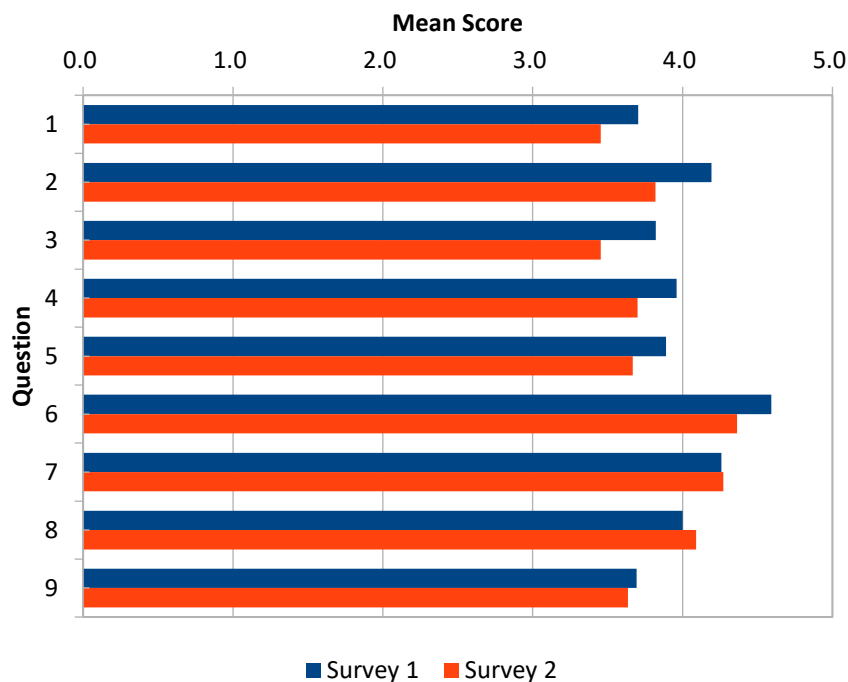


Figure 9. Client 1, Surveys 1 and 2 Compared

These results show very slight increases in people's response to Ann's choice of words and eye-contact, but slight declines in everything else. These results highlight two problems that compromise the second survey's usefulness in this research. First, it represents a very small sample size. It is hard to conclude much of certainty based on the responses of twelve people, when comparing to the previous sample twice that size. Second, there is very small variation in the quantitative results between it and the first survey. Given the small sample size of the second survey, it is hard to draw any firm conclusions from its variances with the first survey. As a result, there is no useful information that can be gleaned from direct comparison of the quantitative sections of the two surveys. The attempt to compare preacher-administered surveys to show tangible results that get noticed in the pews was not successful in the case of this client. There are many uncontrolled variables that may influence the preacher and the congregation on any given Sunday which make it difficult to use people's impressions of sermons on two Sundays as a reliable indicator of the preacher's improvement over time.

However, by putting the quantitative sections of these two surveys in wider context, there may be one useful conclusion that can be drawn from them. Written comments offered in each survey help us do that. One respondent noted that the first sermon was "one of your best." In this person's opinion, that sermon, early in the coaching course, was of higher quality relative to what had come before (point A on the graph below). In the second survey one respondent observed that the sermon was "not up to your usual." In the opinion of this observer, the second sermon was of lower

quality relative to what had become the norm by the end of the coaching course (point B below). The fact that the two sermons received roughly comparable quantitative scores, and yet were evaluated very differently *relative to the trajectory of Ann's preaching* (the first sermon superior to what had come before, but the second sermon mediocre compared to the months before) indicates there was a noticeable (at least in the eyes of these two observers) degree of improvement over the span of the sermon coaching course.

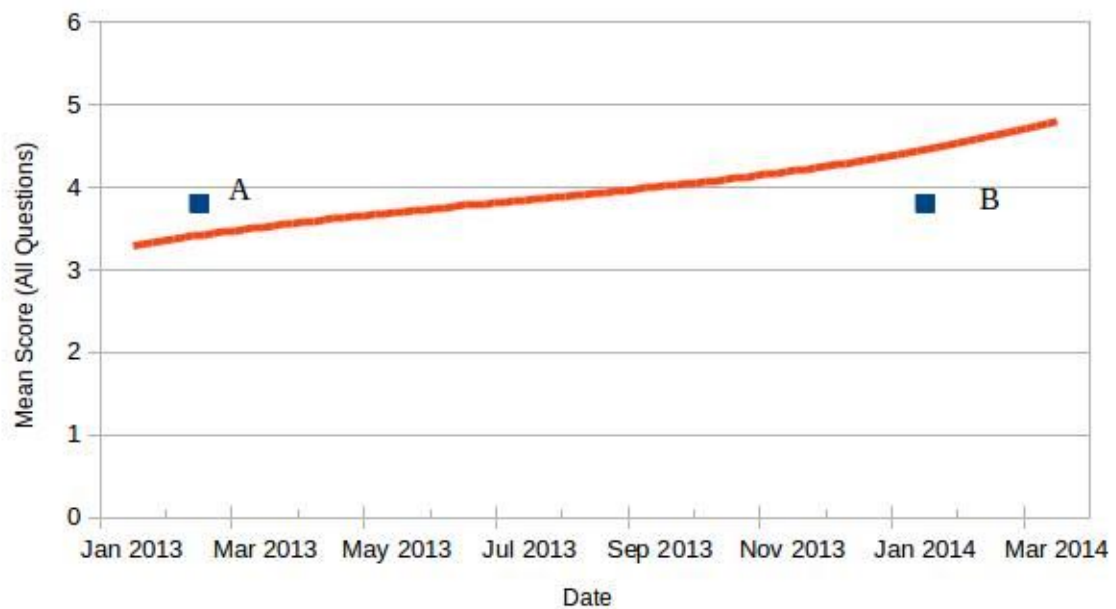


Figure 10. Client 1 Improvement

Admittedly, it is a slender reed, but this anecdotal evidence from a comparison of the two surveys shows improvement in Ann's preaching of sermons delivered during the coaching course. The client's exit interview painted a more conclusive picture of the results of the coaching course.

I conducted the Exit Interview with Ann on February 19, 2014.⁷ The interview began by asking Ann questions about her impressions of the coaching approach, starting with “what have you enjoyed most from our interactions over the last year?”

I’ve enjoyed having a colleague to talk through the text with, whose style is so helpful. You helped me dig deeper into the text and to look at images and metaphors in the text. And I like the pattern of inform, persuade, apply.

First on her list was the relationship, which formed the context for her change, in which she discovered new ways to study the Scripture more deeply and to develop a plan for the sermon.⁸ Within that relationship, the thing Ann found “most helpful about my style” was my inquiring approach:

It was helpful for you to ask questions, which helped me think about what’s going on in the story. Asking “What’s important about that?” helped me dig deeper into the text.

When asked about which aspects of coaching seemed new or unfamiliar, after a thoughtful pause she identified the inquiring approach of coaching, particularly using the developmental questions from Robinsons Ten Stages as a framework for making the sermon clear and relevant. She said:

Some of the questions you ask about the passage were new. I hadn’t asked those questions before. Sometimes your reliance on the text was deeper than mine. Reading the biblical context was a fresh approach for me. I hadn’t considered before what people [in the pews] already know and what they need to have developed in the sermon. In some ways, I was doing these things, but didn’t have a name for them.

⁷ Raymond Wlodkowski, in Strategy 54, urges the use of self-assessment methods that provide learners with the opportunity to construct relevant insights and connections. This “allows adults to explore their surprises, puzzlement, and hunches...[and develop] integration of learning with identity and values” (p. 345). The questions used below were designed to help the clients do that.

⁸ Alan Deutschman observed this in his research.

Since coaching focuses on the client's priorities as a way to leverage their motivation to achieve lasting change, I asked, "On a scale of 1 to 10 how did our time together focus on what's important to you?" She rated that focus a 10, "because you always asked me what I wanted to do, and we did that. Sometimes you redirected me and that was a good thing." Though the client sets the agenda, when the conversation gets off topic, the coach guides the conversation to help the client achieve their agenda. Sensing there was more there, I asked a follow-up question: "Anything else?" Here, Ann highlighted the emphasis coaching places on results, "We really worked on technique, a specific subject with specific goals. It wasn't open-ended like mentoring, counseling, or spiritual direction. It was good getting results."

When asked to rate the value of the coaching course on a scale of 1 to 10, she rated its value at "an eight or nine." When asked to describe what aspects were most helpful, she said:

Your questioning and the urge[ing] to dig deeper into the passage, and helping me find ways to relate the [biblical] context to the preaching text. I took notes on the questions you asked and now I ask myself the questions I need to think through in the sermon writing process. It was also helpful getting affirmation for the ideas I'd developed. That's given me more confidence in myself, that my basic format is good.

She saw these questions as helping her dig into the author's idea and providing a framework for developing it into a clear and relevant message. By hearing these questions over-and-over, Ann learned to answer them, and eventually she learned to ask them herself and incorporate them into her regular preparation process. By presenting the Ten Stages in the format of questions, the coaching method allowed Ann

to see these insights as compatible with her “basic format”. This enhanced her confidence, as did the overall affirmative approach of coaching

Next, she summarized how she had changed her sermon preparation and delivery over the span of the coaching course. She said:

I read the context of the text. I’ve tried using outlines and that’s been helpful. Because I have a better idea of what I want to talk about I’m more focused in my search of the commentaries. This has begun to free me from having to rely the commentaries. I would like to do more.

As for sermon delivery, she noted these changes:

More eye contact, and I’m more passionate about what I’m saying, in my own voice. Improved clarity. I’m trying to tell the story less. I’m getting somewhere... The persuasion aspect is different. I try to make the daily living more concrete in terms of action, [with] less of the vague “trust in God” state-of-mind. A lot of [insight] came from surveys because people [said they] didn’t know what I was asking them to do.

With that summary of the changes, she had made in her preparation and preaching it is important to gauge the degree to which the client learned the Ten Stages. I asked, “what new perspective, concept or information did you gain about preaching?”

A lot of these things I knew before, but they were reinforced. Preaching is more than telling story of the text. Preaching is broader because you can bring in other parts of the bible. It’s narrower because you can focus in on part of the text.

Clearly, coaching succeeded in building on her prior knowledge and experience to both broaden and focus her perspective on preaching. How did that come about? Were there any questions I asked about the text or audience that were helpful? She said, “The questions you asked about the text helped me dig deeper; ‘Why is that important?’... You asked about what we’re trying to persuade them of.” She was quite taken by the developmental questions, as well as the question sets used to interrogate

the Bible text, discern the author's idea, come up with a goal and outline of the sermon. When asked how often she used those questions in her own study she said, "I use them every week." Through repetition, she adapted those questions into her own use, writing them down as a guide to her study. Her write-up is included below to demonstrate the degree to which she adopted Haddon Robinson's Ten Stages.

I want to get to kernel of topic. I want to push my thumb on the kernel until it tells me something. I am looking for universal truths. What is the "money phrase of this text"

What Jesus is thinking about

Why Jesus is talking about what he is talking about

Who is Jesus talking to?

Where is he talking to them?

When is he talking to them? (What is the context of the passage? Does anything before or after – preceding and following chapter or two – connect to this passage and give it further meaning. Has Jesus talked about this before?)

What is going on inside heads of characters?

What is the author talking about? What is he saying about it? In other words, why does he have Jesus tell this story – if we know?

What images in the text are important and why? Is there important wording?

What am I going to say to my congregation? What do they know already? What is being introduced in the passage that they don't know? What needs further development? What is challenging?

What is congregation skeptical about? What obstacles stand in the way of their understanding this passage and how it relates to them? How do I help them?

What meaning will this passage have for their daily lives? What will it mean on Tuesday?

Outline for sermon: information, persuasion, action

Reinforce themes under one topic. Central core idea helps facets stay together as a whole

Formats: question and then build up to answer. Or start with the idea and then unpack

The fact that she was never presented with the Ten Stages in any didactic way demonstrates the effectiveness of the coaching process to inculcate them over time.

Client 1 Conclusions

In conclusion, the course was a success for Ann. From her vantage point, as expressed in the exit interview, she made solid progress, developing her preparation process to shorten prep time (Goal 3), making more time to study the text more deeply and to get the idea of the text, and to be less reliant on the commentaries (Goal 7). This prep process became more systematic and reliable for her, as she clearly assimilated six out of ten of Robinson's sermon planning stages: interrogating the text, articulating the author's main idea, asking the development questions, writing a goal for the sermon, choosing to follow an inductive or deductive approach and writing an outline.

This process helped her gain confidence to try breaking out of the typical mode of preaching just Gospel texts and spending a lot of time in the sermon recounting the story. In the course of our coaching she branched out to preach on the Old Testament lesson ... times, and the Epistle text ... times (Goal 8). And as her capacity increased to independently study the text and determine its meaning, she was able to focus in more

on those meaningful “money quotes” in the text (Goal 2) and present them to the congregation in a relevant way.

Though we did not spend a lot of time in our coaching sessions working on relevant presentation, Ann was clearly focused on these goals and persistently exerted herself to pursue them. From the very start, she began including more personal stories in her preaching, which was noticed and praised in both surveys. She also consciously experimented with ways to improve her gestures (Goal 4), with noticeable, though mixed, results. The same was true of increasing eye contact with the congregation (Goal 5). Deeper study of the text and more thoughtful approach to planning the sermon, combined with practicing the text out loud, seems to have improved her eye contact with the congregation.

Because Ann named eight goals, we were not able to spend time on all of them during our eleven months of coaching. We never really got to preaching without notes (Goal 5) or doing a series of sermons on a single topic (Goal 6). Perhaps, if she had not decided to skip the goal-refining stage early in the course, Ann’s goals would have been fewer and more focused, and therefore easier to achieve, and more amenable to measurable results.

These improvements demonstrate the effectiveness of the coaching principles and techniques used through the course, many of which are clearly-evident in Ann’s case:

1. The power of setting goals was proven early in the course and through its duration. Though perhaps her goals could have been made “smarter,” they

nevertheless helped Ann to focus from the very beginning and persistently pursue specific changes in her preaching.

In coaching, the client always sets the agenda. That principle was proven in Ann's case when we altered the process to follow her priorities. She preferred to proceed with her goals "as-is" and get to work on her sermons. In the exit interview, Ann gave the course a "10" for focusing on what was important to her.

Powerful questions are effective at exegeting both the biblical text and the congregation, by way of the Developmental Questions. In Ann's case, an inquiring approach helped her generate a wealth of insight into the texts she was studying and into the congregation with which she was communicating.

The client becomes the coach. Coaching places high value on the client's responsibility and self-efficacy and seeks to strengthen those. In Ann's case, she began to ask herself the questions repeatedly raised by the coach, eventually turning them into a regular habit in her sermon preparation process.

Focus on results. Coaching seeks to foster momentum by generating "many little wins." Tangible results are a great reward for prolonged effort and motivates further effort. As she spoke favorably of the forward-looking, results-oriented character the course, Ann bore witness to this dynamic.

Ask, don't tell. Though it takes more time to ask questions that draw forth content, the client's learning is more deeply engaged than if the content is

simply supplied to her. By suggesting the Ten Stages to Ann as a series of questions in the context of her sermon preparation, she was able to absorb them into her own process.

Relationships change lives. Coaching relies on an affirming relationship to increase a person's self-confidence and forward momentum. To Ann, this was the most enjoyable and effective part of the coaching experience.

Client 2: David

During the coaching course from early March, 2014 to early February, 2015, David was in his mid-30s and had been on the staff of a large (300 people average Sunday attendance) suburban parish for 3 years after seminary when we began our coaching relationship. We got off to a strong start with good sharing of life stories and clear affinity between coach and client.⁹ He was preaching about once every month. He expressed a very high view of what preaching can be and should be and what good preaching can accomplish. It is "a unique moment when the word of God gets translated practically into people's lives. I'm not standing up there speaking for God, but within the context of worship that's basically what's happening. I'm helping people truly understand what God is saying."

He described extreme frustration, however, with his sermon preparation process. He began working on a sermon three weeks before preaching by reading

⁹ In the subsequent session, he shared his excitement "about the common ground we share." He believed my story "was very important to hear, the transformation you experienced was very powerful to hear."

through the passage several times, “writing down questions, thoughts, key words or phrases, illustration ideas.” He’s “basically brainstorming.” One week before preaching, he would consult commentaries. He was especially fond of Aquinas’ summary of the Fathers on the Gospels, and the ESV Study Bible. He took notes on this reading, then started writing. “I haven’t really figured out how to do that yet,” he said, describing a few different approaches he might take. The process resulted in 15-20 pages of notes, which “stops growing on Friday”. Out of this mass of material, he would try to “edit down” a sermon on Saturday. In the process, he often ended up with four or five different sermons that are half-finished. “I’m usually up pretty late on Saturday night, 1 or 2 am, which hinders my delivery because I’m exhausted.”

David concluded his description of his process saying, “I need help and accountability to create a new sermon preparation pattern that will be sustainable. My tendency is to overstress and overburden and I would like to not do that.” When asked about the cause of the stress, he said, “I can’t find the key idea among the three texts in lectionary. My creative mind produces too much material and I can’t condense it into something simple. I need to be able to find that one idea.” So, at this stage David was beginning to focus on his different priorities for change: a new, sustainable preparation pattern, to be able to find the main idea of the sermon sooner, to be 90% finished with the sermon on Thursday, not spend so much time polishing the prose of his manuscript.

David conducted the initial survey on May 11, at both services. Because of the size of the congregation, he decided not to broadcast the survey to the whole congregation, but instead to select a group of forty people, a representative cross-

section of the congregation. He selected this group of people by searching through the church directory and selecting a group diverse in age, tenure, gender, and perspective on the theological spectrum represented in his congregation. He was satisfied with the draft survey instrument and proposed no changes. The week before the sermon, David distributed survey instruments with a letter asking each recipient to participate in this learning exercise. That Sunday, he received twenty-eight responses, summarized in the graph below, and most were overwhelmingly positive.

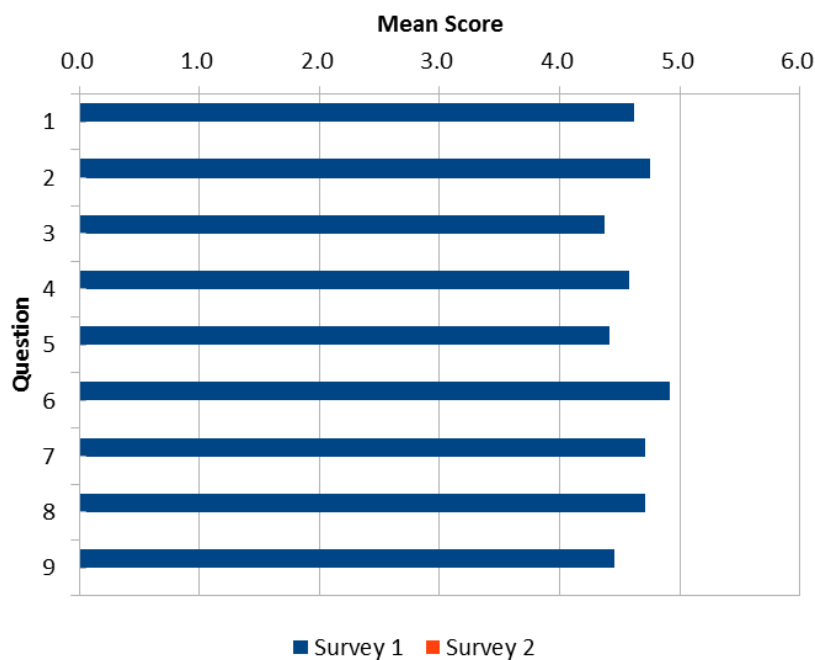


Figure 11. Client 2, Survey 1

In the quantitative section of the survey, David received no answers of 1 or 2, and only seven people offered a 3. However, in reflecting on the sermon during our session three days later, David said his prep process did not go well. He didn't start writing until Thursday. He stayed up late on Saturday and got up early on Sunday to finish the sermon. In the end, he didn't have enough time to write a manuscript, but

stepped into the pulpit with an outline, instead. Despite his exhaustion, David found preaching from an outline resulted in a freer, more passionate and expressive presentation. This came through strongly in the survey responses, in which 93% of responses “strongly agreed” that the “preacher believed what he was saying.” He also got high marks (82% strongly agreed) on “gestures and facial expressions,” and “eye contact” (79%) were effective. When asked to describe the greatest strength of the sermon, six people commented on his passion and five observed how personally engaging the sermon was. One respondent offered this, “Eye contact with the congregation was a particular strength. Left the impression that the sermon was extemporaneous.” David’s presentation was obviously strong.

The clarity and coherence of the sermon, however, was not quite as obvious to survey respondents. The arrangement and illustrations of the sermon received a relatively low response (only 50% “strongly agreed”) while marginally more people thought the sermon “communicated a single main idea” and “the plain meaning of the Scripture was made clear” (60% and 57% respectively). When asked what would make the sermon stronger, three people mentioned the need for more concrete examples to illustrate the message.

Refining and Implementing Goals

As David and I talked in the early sessions, I was noting the different priorities for change he was identifying. He articulated a need for: a new, sustainable preparation pattern, the ability to find the main idea of the sermon sooner, the sermon to be 90%

finished on Thursday, and less time spent polishing the prose of his manuscript. From the survey results, he identified other priorities for improvement. First, he reiterated the need to find “the main idea” of the sermon, instead of playing with many interesting ideas. Second, he realized he had to improve his arrangement of the sermon and his use of verbal cues to help people follow it. Third, he needed to develop more personal and concrete illustrations. Fourth, he wanted to improve his use of his voice.¹⁰ He ended up with three goals

1. Effective immediately, every sermon will have a single main idea that mirrors the author’s main idea, which I will write down by Tuesday of the week I preach.
2. Effective immediately, every sermon will have a clear, coherent structure in which every point is summarized by a sentence, which I will write down and share with a colleague by Thursday morning.
3. Every sermon will have effective illustrations that pass the “illustration test” which I will apply Thursday afternoon.

In the midst of the rigors of refining these goals, I asked David to reflect on the work we were doing. He said, “I don’t like it, but it’s helpful.” When asked why he didn’t like it, he replied, “I just assume that a lot of these things are understood, stating the obvious.” In spite of that, he still found the exercise very helpful.

Stating the obvious is a very clarifying process, making it simple, basic, clear. I have a lot of anxiety about my preaching because of all the stuff swirling in my head. Making it simple and basic is helpful to reduce the anxiety and make things clearer.

¹⁰Chapter four, beginning with session seven, described how this client prioritized these goals and made them S.M.A.R.T.

Bob and Megan Tschannen-Moran observed that, “Coaching involves helping individuals access what they know. They may never have asked themselves the questions, but they have the answers.”¹¹ The coaches job is to ask those powerful, evocative questions that assist a person in thinking through their values and priorities, the goals and situations, their obstacles and opportunities. Haddon Robinson said, “Thinking is hard work; thinking about thinking is even harder work.” In making S.M.A.R.T. goals, David was not only thinking, he was doing the hard work of thinking about thinking. The coach, just by asking powerful questions within this framework, is able to help the client achieve clarity and simplicity for himself. Those are real results, hard-earned, and increasingly hard-wired, through practice, in the client’s thought processes.

Chapter Four documents the step-by-step practice of coaching with David, which I will simply summarize here. With three well-refined goals David and I were able to cover the ground necessary for the client to feel like he had made substantial progress in achieving his goals. He took a very disciplined, sequential approach to reaching his goals focusing first on Goal 1 for four sessions. By September 3, 2014 he was confidently working with the author’s idea and wondering what to do with it. That led naturally to Goal 2, developing an outline, which we worked on for five sessions. By October 22 we were evaluating and fine-tuning the process he used to develop the outline for a sermon. He was ready to tackle Goal 3, developing his “illustration test” to

¹¹ *Evocative Coaching*, 13. This illustrates the evocative coaching value of “consciousness” which seeks to increase self-awareness, self-knowledge, and self-monitoring in the client. It correlates to the “consciousness raising” change process, as defined by Prochaska, Norcross and DiClemente, as discussed in chapter three.

guide him in selecting good illustrations. We worked on that for two sessions until the end of our course on December 10. At that time, he had devised the “test,” used it in writing one sermon, and we were able to evaluate the experience together. In most of our sessions, David was very goal-oriented. In contrast to Ann, who had sermon prep at the forefront and goals in the background, David approached most sessions in terms of the goal he focused on. The work we did thinking through his sermon preparation or reflecting on the sermon he had preached the week before usually came under the rubric of working on such-and-such goal that day.

Measures of Improvement

David conducted the final survey on January 4, 2015 using the same sampling method as the first survey. He distributed the survey to the same group of forty people. Only thirteen people, however, returned survey forms, less than half of the twenty-eight respondents for the first survey. The date of the survey can partially account for the low response rate. The Sunday after New Year’s is a notorious “low Sunday” in Episcopal churches. David reflected on the low response saying simply,

There were not many people in church the week I preached. Based on a visual scan of the congregation, nearly all of the people that I asked to complete a survey and that were present in church on Jan. 4th, completed the survey. I received multiple emails late Saturday night and early Sunday morning from parishioners who said they were out of town and would not be able to evaluate the sermon.

However, this may not entirely explain the low rate of return as we observe a similar pattern in response rate to Ann’s final survey. So, we find ourselves in much the same position as we were with Ann’s final survey. Too little data from the second attempt

and very slight variation of results (within .2) make it difficult to draw comparisons and firm conclusions.

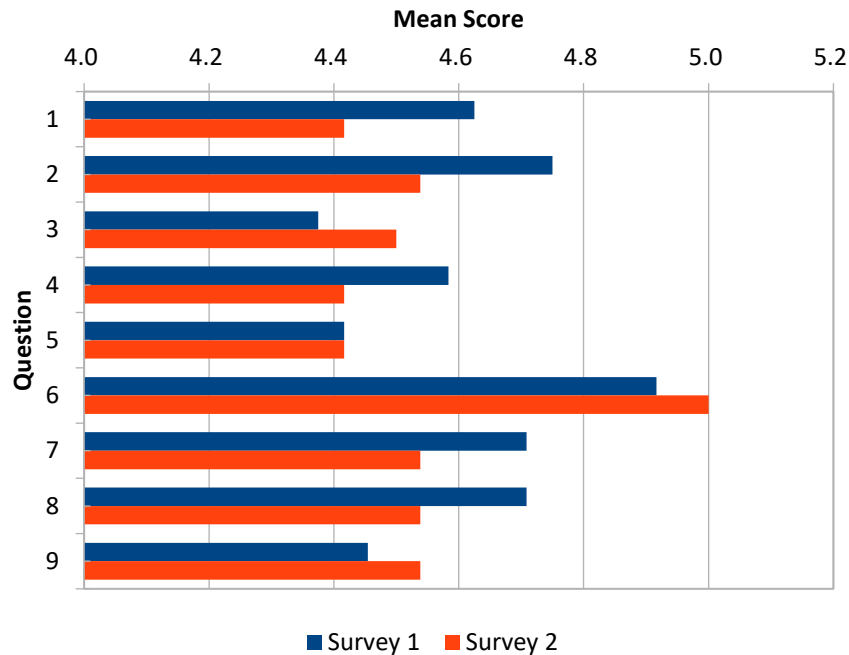


Figure 12. Client 2, Surveys 1 and 2 Compared

Here again, there are many uncontrollable variables involved, which may affect the preacher and the audience. This makes it difficult to count on a single preaching event as a reliable measure of progress over a year-long course. As with Ann's survey, we may also note the general (if slight) downward trend in people's responses to David's sermon. Perhaps, it was the day or season influencing either the preacher or respondents, or both. For instance, David described the sermon and the factors influencing his performance. When asked to rate it on a scale of 1-10, he replied,

It was a seven. Good content, but a tough week schedule-wise made me not as prepared as I'd like. Another day to work out the kinks would have made it an 8 or 9. My parents were in town and school was out for Christmas. That made my preparation a little less efficient.

Though David's scores declined slightly in the quantitative section of the survey, people's comments in the qualitative section confirmed the strengths identified in the previous survey and indicated progress in the areas identified in David's goals.

Consistent with the previous sermon, David received strong affirmation for his passion and sincerity and "relatability" in the pulpit. Five people commented that was the greatest strength of the sermon. This time, however, two people also noted that it was a "clear message." Another said it was, "Easy to follow...you kept bringing the point home," and another agreed, identifying "The repetition of the word 'expectation'..." which helped the listener follow the sermon.¹² Two others identified the "great visuals" and "clear illustrations" as the greatest strength of the sermon. These positive comments correspond neatly with David's goals, and show that his progress was noticeable to people in the pews. When asked what could have been stronger about the sermon, four people in the first survey suggested David "use his voice to emphasize certain points." In the second survey, only one person alluded to that issue.

Proportionally, that was a 75% improvement.

There was one other large measure of improvement in David's case. He was able to resolve a core dilemma he had struggled with as a preacher. He sought to be Spirit-empowered. Thinking he was allowing the Spirit freedom to work, he was open-ended and even disorganized in his preparation. Developing an organized thought process for systematically preparing sermons initially felt like something that might stifle the Spirit's

¹² Three sharp-eyed observers suggested that the middle of the sermon could have used some more verbal cues to make it "better tied-together," in the words of one.

work. He resisted being “process-bound.” However, in time, with practice and experience he discovered for himself through coaching that this is not an either-or choice. He found that the process created a context within which the Spirit had more freedom to work. Because the structure reduced his stress, David was found it much easier to sense where the Spirit was leading him. The debilitating and exhausting stress he had experienced on Saturdays as he struggled to find a sermon in the midst of a mass of material, waiting for the Spirit to lead, ending up working into the early morning hours on Sunday became what Tschannen-Moran call “eustress,” or good stress, in which “we are engaged in an activity, but not overwhelmed, in control of our experience, but not bored...” This state of mind is often called the ‘sweet spot.’ It is the experience of ‘flow’ where the dynamic interplay of challenge and accomplishment are highly stimulating. That is a much better experience than stress and exhaustion. Coaching helped David change his experience of sermon preparation in that way.

Tschannen-Moran explained how:

This is the sweet spot that evocative coaches seek to hit with teachers...challenging teachers to stretch their thinking and feeling, while being affirmative and empathetic to avoid distress...as teachers actively pursue new possibilities and experiment with new designs.¹³

I conducted the Exit Interview with David on January 25, 2015. I began by asking David questions about his impressions of the coaching approach, starting with “What have you enjoyed most from our interactions over the last year?”

I’ve enjoyed the sense of being empowered to be a better preacher. Your approach as coach has been to trust that I have some innate ability to be a

¹³ Tschannen-Moran, *Evocative Coaching*, 182.

preacher. You haven't been evaluating my preaching, but motivating and empowering, which works well for me. It makes it fun for me to preach and be excited about the changes. If the change is really going to 'take' it's got to be generated from my own desire for improvement.

David was clearly enthusiastic about his experience of coaching over the course of the year and his impressions from that experience highlight several core principles of coaching in a vivid and concise way. First, on his list was the effect of the coach believing in the client's "innate ability" stimulated his self-efficacy. That had the effect of leveraging the client's motivation to get results. Those concrete results generated momentum, which further enhanced the sense of self-efficacy and confidence. This cycle generates lasting change that can really take root. David is a good example of what Raymond Wlodkowski saw as the "*sine qua non* of adult instruction." David's experience of coaching demonstrates the powerful combination of motives in adult learners: "success + volition + value + enjoyment." Wlodkowski described how these motives can interact to create truly transformational learning experiences. "Adults want to be joyful in the pursuit of valued learning, especially in the realms of life where competence is cherished but formidable to obtain...Instructors who teach in this manner are truly masterful because they have made the difficult desirable."¹⁴ As the "instructor" in this case, I would have to deflect credit from myself to the power of coaching as a tool of facilitating adult learning. Curious about what aspect of the coaching experience had made that impact, I asked, "How has coaching been motivating and empowering to you?"

¹⁴ Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, 101.

You ask lots of good questions. You've done a very good job of letting me muddle through, without jumping in and telling me how to do something. It's been a real clarifying process for me and you've made that possible by being patient and trusting the process and not trying to squeeze the results out.

David believed that the inquiring approach is what made the impact. One of the most basic disciplines of the coach is to ask, not tell. Asking a question means patiently waiting for the client to figure out, or "muddle through" the answer. Then he owns the insight that comes along with the answer. Though it can be uncomfortable and difficult, the client's hard work makes it a truly "clarifying process." When asked "what was most helpful about my style of serving you?" David said:

Most helpful has been what I've already said, but also helpful is the comfortability (*sic*). You put people at ease, which is important when talking about something as vulnerable as my preaching. I felt very open and honest about my strengths and weaknesses. You've done a very good job to create the space where that change could be made.

Here, David put his finger on the relational aspect of coaching. The "comfortability" and rapport that was established in the beginning created a sense of safety where he could be transparent on issues where he felt vulnerable, like his preaching struggles. Later in the interview, David rated the course a "10" when asked how well it addressed what was important to him. He said, "There were moments when it felt like preaching therapy. I was able to share deep fears." The fact, noted above, that "you haven't been evaluating my preaching" freed him to evaluate his own. The positive, results-oriented focus of coaching allowed him to self-evaluate without becoming overly critical of himself, a tendency which he acknowledged a few times during the course. Coaching turned his self-critique into real change.

When given the opportunity to reflect on anything distracting to him about coaching, David briefly explored his struggle in the early sessions with adjusting to the unfamiliar coaching approach. He went on to describe the aspects of coaching that seemed unfamiliar:

I think the degree to which it was self-directed, especially coming from seminary which is a more top-down approach. There were moments when I felt like it was a little too nebulous. "Is this really going to help me?" I was waiting to have someone come and tell me what I should do instead of figuring it out for myself.

The contrast between a coaching approach, which asks the client to be the primary content provider in the learning experience, and a mentoring or teaching approach, in which the instructor provides the content, is quite clear in David's experience. As he indicated above, the responsibility of "figuring it out for myself," though initially more difficult, ended up being a more rewarding and effective way of learning. Malcom Knowles described this experience: "The adults we work with have by and large not learned to be self-directing inquirers. They have been conditioned to be dependent on teachers to teach them. And so, they often experience a form of culture-shock when first exposed to adult educational programs that require them to participate in the planning."¹⁵

I asked David about how effective he was in defining goals, translating them into action, and making changes.

I felt I was miserable at defining those goals. I think I learned how to do it a lot better so I can do it more efficiently in the future to make them effective tools for growth. Once I had them I really tried to stick to them. I was disappointed

¹⁵ Knowles, Holton, and Swanson, *The Adult Learner*, 116.

with the second survey. And I was wondering if there was a way to work them more explicitly into the survey.

Once David got the hang of making S.M.A.R.T. goals he discovered the great value of having and adhering to them. He learned how useful the process of goal-making is as a “tool for growth” in other areas of life. I could have told him this, but it was far better for him to experience it for himself. It took longer, but now he really knows it and owns it. Advice is more quickly dispensed, but is also much more quickly forgotten.

Next, I explored with David his impressions of the effectiveness of the sermon coaching program, as a whole. “On a scale of 1 to 10,” I asked him, “how valuable was this course for you?” Initially, he gave it a “10,” but then revised his estimate. “Maybe a 9 because I feel like I still have a lot to do to achieve my goals.” When asked to describe what aspects were most helpful to him, he replied,

I would say it's the cumulative effective of the coaching experience. It goes back to helping me think like a preacher, more self-aware, cognizant of how I'm preparing and preaching. Even though I didn't meet my goals 100% I am moving forward toward them, establishing healthier patterns. Even if my survey results weren't knock-it-out-of-the-park I am a better preacher now and am set up to become a better preacher going forward. It's moving in a much better direction than when we started.

He put his finger on two helpful aspects of coaching. First, it helped him learn how to “think like a preacher.” That is the explicit goal of Haddon Robinson's Ten Stages, and the coaching approach has very efficiently and effectively facilitated David's discovery and absorption of that thought process. His observation here strongly validates my thesis that the combination of a coaching approach and Haddon Robinson's Ten Stages will effectively help preachers improve. Though these results were not captured by the

second survey, David had a keen sense of them nevertheless. His only suggestion for improving the coaching course was more time to fully address the third goal.

The interview then explored how David had changed his sermon preparation and delivery. David said his preparation, “is far more organized, more than anything.” He attributed that to the Ten Stages, which helped him be more organized in a way that gave freedom for the Spirit to move. “The set method, with a timeline for the planning process, adds that level of intentionality, which creates space for the work of the Spirit when the anxiety is removed from it.” The structure helps to remove anxiety. As for his sermon delivery, “I feel like it has become more focused on one main idea,” which is to say clearer. In addition, “I’ve become more confident as a preacher. There were times when I’ve been so confused or anxious during the week that I’m not confident in the pulpit.” The structure gives confidence that makes for a more compelling presentation. He has also gained deeper self-knowledge as a preacher, which will facilitate continued learning and growth once the coaching course has concluded:

I’ve become FAR more self-aware through this process. The survey results didn’t surprise me. I’m more aware of how the preparation process is connected to the results of the sermon that is delivered. Even when I was preaching, knowing the questions on the survey, I was wondering how they would respond. My early sermons here at [my church] I was just scared. I had very little self-awareness of my craft as I was practicing it. Now with this awareness I’ll be able to grow exponentially more going forward. I’m much better equipped to continue my own improvement.

Bob and Megan Tschannen-Moran consider “concern for consciousness,” which they define as “increased self-awareness, self-knowledge, and self-monitoring,” as one of the

key ingredients that makes coaching evocative.¹⁶ David clearly exhibited this attribute, offering further confirmation of the success of the coaching course. Furthermore, coaches are supposed to work themselves out of a job by strengthening clients' ability to coach themselves and equip themselves to become a continuous learner. David discovered that in his experience and has internalized it for himself.

In the last block of questions, I sought to gauge the client's learning of the Ten Stages. I started with a wide open question, "What new perspective or concept did you gain about preaching?" David's answer returned to his earlier contrast between coaching approach to adult learning and the more traditional approach of classroom instruction and mentoring. The difference he highlighted was the relational emphasis of coaching,

Just being able to talk with someone about my struggles and fears and failures...being able to verbalize that was invaluable. To be able to ask about your experiences helped to normalize my struggles. I've done a lot of public speaking as a teacher, but preaching is different. While I was in seminary I preached 3 times. In my field ed. sites the preacher wasn't generous with the pulpit. Seminary doesn't feel like it's doing a good job of preparing preachers.

From his own relatively recent experience of homiletics training in seminary and field-education, David was enthusiastic about the difference our coaching relationship made in enhancing his ability to learn and improve as a preacher. This illustrates beautifully the contrast between andragogy and traditional approaches to academic instruction. Knowles said, "In conventional education, the student is required to adjust himself to an established curriculum; in adult education the curriculum is built around the student's

¹⁶ Tschannen-Moran, *Evocative Coaching*, 12.

needs and interests...Authoritative teaching, [with] examinations which preclude original thinking, [and] rigid pedagogical formulae..." contrast sharply with adult learning in which students "dig down into the reservoirs of their experience before resorting to texts and secondary facts."¹⁷ Still looking for evidence of the client's appropriation of the Ten Stages, I asked a bit of a leading question, inquiring how helpful were my questions about the text and the audience. He indicated that questions about the author's idea and the contemporary audience were very helpful. "Those made my sermons more cohesive and approachable." I asked how often he uses those questions in his own study and planning. He described his process,

When I sit down to write a sermon I pull out my sermon goals and the different tools I've created and Robinson's book. I get the author's idea and ask, What does it mean? Is it true? What difference does it make? Those are huge questions in my mind once I figure out the main idea. I have my prep tools: the timelines in my goals, my illustration test. I like Robinson's chart derived from Bloom's Taxonomy for defining the goal of the sermon. I use that all the time. I focus on effective use of language, finding the one good zinger word that make it more specific and makes it 'stick.'

David had discovered and fully absorbed, adapted, and integrated the Ten Stages into his sermon preparation process. And he believed that the effect is noticeable to his congregation. I asked him to summarize the progress people noted most in the second survey. He said, "People noted that I seem more confident and comfortable in my preaching. My enthusiasm and passion stood out more. People see my delivery is warmer and more engaging." He attributed those changes to his improved preparation

¹⁷ Knowles, Holton, Swanson, *The Adult Learner*, 36.

process, “that has helped me write a better sermon which makes me more comfortable and confident preaching it.”

Client 2 Conclusions

David came to sermon coaching frustrated by his sermon preparation process. He walked away feeling like he had made significant progress and was equipped to continue to improve as a preacher. David said in our exit interview, “Even if my survey results weren’t knock-it-out-of-the-park I am a better preacher now and am set up to become a better preacher going forward. It’s moving in a much better direction than when we started.” He had developed three good goals and had systematically taken action to fulfill them through the course, coming up a bit short at the end with Goal 3. It would have been helpful to have some additional time together to practice using his illustration test, evaluating its effectiveness and fine-tuning it. As noted, however, David will be able to do that on his own. While struggling to achieve his goals, David found Robinson’s Ten Stages a natural and very helpful resource for identifying the author’s idea, then moving toward an outline for the sermon, then selecting and shaping illustrative material for the sermon.

This process greatly reduced David’s stress level during the week of sermon preparation, with several benefits. First, the process reduced stress by helping him focus on what is most important in the material he was studying and avoiding rabbit trails. Being able to “trust the process” and his preparation time-line enabled him to be consistently productive, step-by-step through the week instead of coming down to

crunch time on Saturday and stress out and stay up late trying to condense material into a coherent sermon. Second, he learned that an organized step-by-step process, rather than limiting insight and inspiration from the Holy Spirit, actually created more space for the Spirit to move. And the lessened anxiety that resulted allowed David to more easily respond to the Spirit leading. Third, the reduced stress, in turn, translated into greater confidence, creativity and freedom in the pulpit. Though the second survey respondents were generally not aware of David's progress in the sermon they evaluated, they did notice those changes.

These improvements demonstrate the effectiveness of the coaching principles and techniques used through the course, many of which are clearly evident in David's case:

1. Relationships change lives. From the very beginning David noted the importance of the coaching relationship, feeling immediately "the common ground we share." At the end, he attributed "being able to talk with someone" in an open and transparent way about the difficulties of sermon preparation as a big part of his success improving.
2. Turning problems into solutions. David was discouraged by his difficulties preparing sermons, but coaching gave him hope of taking action to make fundamental changes. That change began with envisioning an ideal future, translating that into goals, then planning actions that will achieve those goals. Coach and client then shared the journey together of making action into habits that solve the problems he named at the beginning.

3. Powerful questions surface “the obvious.” Early in the coaching course David struggled with the unfamiliarity of the “inquiring approach.” Many of the questions forced him to state what he felt like were “obvious” matters. David learned in hind-sight, though, that this exercise in “trying to articulate my thoughts” helped bring to the surface implicit values and assumptions that could then be examined and acted upon. It allowed more deep-seated change.
4. Focus on priorities strengthens motivation. David gave the course a “10” for its focus on what was important to him. That focus stimulated his motivation and generated real results. Once he developed his goals, he owned them and that had the effect of “motivating and empowering... my own desire for improvement.” It is what he enjoyed most about the course.
5. The power of small wins. David expressed repeatedly during the course being excited by the changes he was making. Those “small wins” quickly changed the atmosphere of his preparation process from being full of anxiety to being exciting and hopeful and characterized by a growing momentum for improvement.
6. Keep responsibility with the client. David noticed how different coaching was from other forms of homiletical training he had experienced. It wasn’t “top-down” instruction or critique, but was “self-directed” and forced him to “figure it out for myself.” This greatly enhanced his sense of ownership of the

outcomes. By assuming that the client is the expert, the coach is freed from the burden of giving advice, much of which might miss the mark.

7. Teach a man to think. Both coaching and Robinson's Ten Stages are all about inculcating a thought process. When combined together, coaching provides a thought process for helping the client figure out and adopt for themselves the thought process of the Ten Stages. The two processes are entirely compatible. David noticed the result. He learned to "think like a preacher" without me ever having to tell him how.
8. Work yourself out of a job. The end result of successful coaching is for the client to become their own coach, "equipped," as David said, "to continue my own improvement." Though we were not able to fully address his final goal, David seemed confident of his ability to maintain the momentum of improvement.

Client 3: Mark

Circumstances were different in the relationship with this client than the previous two in context, complexity, and experience. Whereas the other clients were experienced preachers established in their own church contexts, Mark was a seminary student doing four semesters of field education in the coach's own congregation. This meant a longer relationship that spanned nearly two years rather than one year or less. It was also a more-involved relationship focused on more than just sermon coaching in bi-monthly, hour-long phone conversations. We met in person, on a weekly basis and

were able to conduct most of our coaching sessions over lunch, or in my office. These factors resulted in a deeper sense of friendship and familiarity in our relationship.

The relationship was also more complex. I was in a supervisory role with Mark, helping him prepare for ordination by gaining experience and skill in a wide range of parochial tasks. The sermon coaching course was woven in with these other priorities, which meant it didn't always follow the linear, bi-monthly, session-by-session path described in chapter four. As Mark described in the exit interview, this made it more challenging to focus just on sermon coaching. Unlike other clients, our sessions seldom focused on preaching alone, but covered a number of different topics. In addition, it resulted in less consistent documenting of the contents of our coaching sessions. With phone clients, I never had opportunity to be present for their sermons, but relied exclusively on their own description and self-critique. In Mark's case, however, I was present for most of his sermons and was able to develop my own impressions and offer critique in person.

In addition, Mark was a new preacher. This coaching course is designed primarily to help experienced preachers improve within the context of their on-going ministry. It assumes that the client already has well-established patterns of sermon preparation and delivery, has come to feel a level of dissatisfaction with them, and is motivated to make changes. Mark started the coaching course having preached a handful of times as a layman in his home church, and had begun a homiletics course at seminary. He was open and eager to learn how to preach effectively. Coaching assumes that the client is the expert of their own life and skills and is able to draw on

deep resources of preaching experience to devise ways to improve. With Mark, I had to revise these assumptions and adopt a hybrid approach that combined mentoring, as described in chapter one, and coaching.¹⁸

In this hybrid approach, especially early on, I included a “telling” stance to the unusual “inquiring” approach to facilitate Mark’s learning. That “telling” included me offering immediate feedback on sermons, noting strengths, highlighting areas where he could improve, and, at times, suggesting principles and techniques for him to consider in his revisions. In addition, Mark was able to observe these principles and techniques in practice by watching me preach on a regular basis.¹⁹ Mark’s learning experience was thus quite different from the other clients. The hybrid approach changed over time. In the first year, there was more opportunity for mentoring and instruction and critique. When Mark returned for his second year, after spending the summer working full-time in another congregation, he was much more self-reliant as a preacher, so our relationship evolved into a purer coaching approach. These differences demonstrate the adaptability of the coaching approach to the needs of different clients.

In our early sessions, Mark was quite open and transparent and it was easy to build rapport with him. When discussing the steps Mark took in his sermon writing

¹⁸ Malcom Knowles recognized that subject-matter and situation differences might require adjusting the androgogical approach to adapt to the learner: “Different subject matter may require different learning strategies...not all subject matter can be taught or learned in the same way;” Knowles, Holton, and Swanson, *The Adult Learner*, 151.

¹⁹ Wlodkowski described in Strategy 19 how, “modeling is one of the best strategies for enhanced performance in new learning;” Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, 197. “Observing how similar adults successfully perform a learning task can be a powerful positive influence;” Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, 196.

process, he shared the method he was learning in his homiletics course that semester. The method was called the Sermon Journal. On page one of the Journal, the preacher is to write “initial reactions, questions, comments on the biblical text.” On page two, the preacher writes exegetical notes which include, “any of the questions you are accustomed to asking when exegeting a biblical text, for instance: word study, notes on the grammar or syntax of the text in its original language, considering the form of the text, the literary contexts, etc. We prefer that you do your own exegetical work on the text rather than solely citing from commentaries.”

On page three of this guideline, the preacher is directed to write a paragraph about the congregation’s culture, then another paragraph about “how your congregation would hear the text on which you are preaching, and what God might be saying to them through the text.” On page four, the preacher is to write about how the text might “touch your life today? What is God saying to you personally through this text today? How is this passage saving your life today?” Using this method, Mark’s preparation process consisted of reading the passage repeatedly in the two weeks before preaching, reading as many commentaries as he could in the time available, writing out the answers to these questions and trying to reduce all that material into a sermon manuscript. It was an exhausting process that yielded unsatisfactory results.

The challenge at the beginning of the coaching process with Mark was finding a foundation to build on, given his scant background in preaching, and the marginally helpful Sermon Journal format. He knew he wanted to develop his sermon preparation process to be more efficient. And he knew he needed to develop his sermon

presentation abilities to connect better with the congregation. In exploring with him what these improvements might look like in specific terms, I realized his lack of background made it difficult for him to conceptualize and articulate good answers. We decided to let him preach, see how he did, and build from there.

Mark preached his first sermon on October 20, 2013. He sent me the sermon draft a few days beforehand (the only client to do so), which gave the opportunity to offer coaching questions via email, as part of the preparation process. Those questions encouraged Mark to focus on a single point in his sermon, to make his material relevant, and to make his language more compact, clear and vivid. The sermon turned out to have many weaknesses. As Mark said, it was “choppy and disconnected,” unclear on several points. It was mostly an autobiographical account of his personal struggle with the text and did not really have the congregation in mind. Based on his experience preparing and delivering that sermon, we were able to identify several areas for work in the month ahead before his survey sermon.

A month later, Mark conducted the survey with his sermon on November 17 at all three services. He distributed survey forms to two-hundred-fourteen people and received eighty-two responses.

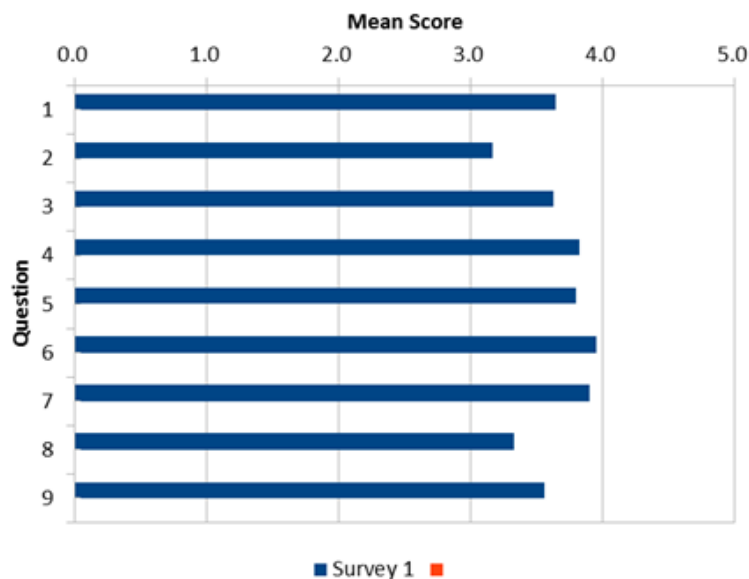


Figure 13. Client 3, Survey 1

Mark's hearers most appreciated his sincerity (question 6) word choice (question 7), and his efforts to effectively communicate a single idea (question 1) that made the meaning of scripture clear (question 4), and relevant through good illustrations (question 5). These strengths were borne out abundantly in people's comments. In contrast, Mark's introduction (question 2) and eye contact (question 8) were not as well appreciated. Nearly one third of respondents commented in the qualitative section that Mark was reading the manuscript without looking up, many others also identified the low volume of Mark's voice, slow pace and lack of passion and tonal inflection in his presentation as distractions. One person noted, "Presentation is the weak part of the sermon...Efforts to improve presentation would make the sermon more effective."

The big revelation for Mark from this initial survey was that he needed to not just preach a sermon that seemed good to him. He realized he had to communicate something clearly *to the congregation*, "not just express my own thoughts and

experience.” He needed to focus on what the congregation hears; the main idea, content, and delivery of the sermon. These areas became the grist for Mark’s goals, which were gradually taking shape over the winter. By April, Mark was able to put his goals into written form with measurable timeframes.

Preparation:

In order to better organize and prepare a cogent message I have laid out a time line with associated targets. Goal: develop that singular point [of the sermon] and be able to say it in a way that is authentic to me.

- 1) 3 Weeks before sermon: Outline the Text being preached, including any questions to be researched, resulting in the single sentence summary of the text.
- 2) 2 Weeks before sermon: Think/Feel/Act/Behavior Change developed into a message. Make an outline of the sermon. Formulate possible openings.
- 3) 1 Week before sermon: Revise sermon text, clear language of clutter, decide on opening.
- 4) 3-4 Days before sermon: Practice, Practice, Practice – get comfortable with the wording.

Presentation:

- 1) Eye Contact: locate at least 12 faces throughout the congregation, make eye contact. Reinforce scanning whole congregation.
- 2) Voice Modulation: Pay attention to punctuation and use oral punctuation. Use small group in congregation for feedback.
- 3) Voice Projection: Be intentional about speaking louder, “sending” my voice to the back of room. Make note in sermon manuscript of places where volume is critical, check against small group observers.
- 4) Clarity: Both written and oral. Be able to show the path or pattern to the point that all build and point to the main theme of the Sermon.

Impact:

- 1) Poll the small group for theme, in their words. Will they be able to tell me the message in a sentence or two?
- 2) Sample 4-5 people to see if they remember the message 7-10 days later. What, if anything did they remember?

We spent the rest of the spring semester refining these goals. For the Preparation goals, we focused on integrating those tasks into his schedule by defining the day and time he would do each of these preparation activities. By the end of the fall 2014 semester, he had built these activities into his schedule. We also explored what specific study disciplines Mark would use to get to the meaning of the text. Most of our coaching sessions in the first year delved into his work with the Scripture text, as he prepared upcoming sermons. Coaching consisted of me asking the appropriate Prep Questions of the text. Through practice, he readily adopted this inductive approach to studying the text and determining the author's intent. Mark soon noticed he wasn't using commentaries nearly as much because he was developing enough material on his own to preach. The discipline of driving to the single sentence summary of the author's point helped Mark focus that material in very helpful ways. It took a while to get used to thinking that way and he felt like he finally "got it" in his Maundy Thursday sermon, on April 17, 2014. With much work and practice Mark gained facility doing it on his own by the end of the second semester, identifying the author's idea and working to make his wording clear, concrete and concise. By the third semester, he had largely assimilated this approach on his own, and was utilizing it naturally in the fourth semester.

Mark left for the summer of 2014 to work full-time at another Field Ed site. This experience allowed him to spread his wings and gain more independence in his sermon preparation, which allowed me to serve Mark mostly as coach when he returned for the third semester at St. Peter's. Mark's next challenge was transitioning from the author's

idea to a plan for the sermon so we began spending time in September to define the meaning of the Preparation goals: “Think/Feel/Act/Behavior Change developed into a message.” He described the task this way: “Taking the idea and working out from there, ending up with a clear idea of the change in people’s thinking, feeling and behavior.” In other words, he had identified the need to move from the author’s idea to the goal for the sermon. After spending the better part of the session asking questions to elicit a clearer picture of the steps he might take to get there, I thought a shift from coaching to mentoring might be more effective at this point. When I suggested that possibility, Mark asked me for some resources that might help, so I offered a copy of the Ten Stage Prep Questions. Stages 4-7 were particularly useful at this point in his sermon preparation. At the end of the session I suggested to Mark, “Try those and let’s talk next week.” When next week’s appointment came along, he was very excited by what he was able to accomplish using the Prep Questions.

This was a turning point for Mark. Before, we had spent most of our time together studying the scripture text and working on the author’s idea (in Mark’s parlance, “Week 3 stuff”). Now, we were able to focus concertedly on Week 2: the process of planning the sermon. We spent most of our coaching sessions in the third and fourth semesters learning and practicing these skills in preparing each sermon he preached, and reflecting on the results. In those sessions, I served Mark mostly as a coach. Since he was preaching once a month, he was able to observe me preaching two or three times a month and to see me practicing the same principles he was discovering and trying to build into his preaching. It was a good learning process for Mark. Along

the way, he was also working on his introductions and conclusions and selecting good illustrations that accurately drive the point home in a relevant way.

Most of our coaching time focused on Mark's Preparation goals. However, over the span of all four semesters Mark was also quietly working on his Presentation goals as well. As his adherence to his preparation timeline became habitual, Mark had more time to practice his presentation, freeing his eyes from his manuscript to find those twelve faces in the congregation. To improve voice modulation, he initially used notations in his sermon manuscript to remind himself where to place tonal emphasis. But, as he deepened his familiarity with the material he was preaching, gained comfort in the pulpit and confidence in his skills, Mark's voice modulation became more natural and less in need of artificial prompts. To improve his voice projection, Mark consulted with the Music Director to train his voice and breathing in the second semester. The fact that he sang the *Exultet* that year at the Great Vigil of Easter gave them a lot of opportunity to work together on both his modulation and projection to great effect. During all four semesters Mark was also working very hard to tighten up his language to make it clearer, more vivid, concrete and specific.

Measures of Improvement

By the end of the fourth semester Mark was a confident, experienced preacher, able to prepare his sermons on his own, self-critique and self-improve. He had addressed his goals and was eager to hear what the congregation would have to say in the final survey. Mark conducted the final survey on May 17, 2015 by distributing the

survey instrument to all three services, like the first survey. Whereas he received eighty-four responses the first time, the response rate dipped a bit the second time around. Mark received sixty-five forms back, roughly 75 percent of the original response.²⁰ Unlike Ann and David, however, Mark’s hearers gave him uniformly and markedly higher numbers for this sermon, compared to his sermon eighteen months earlier.

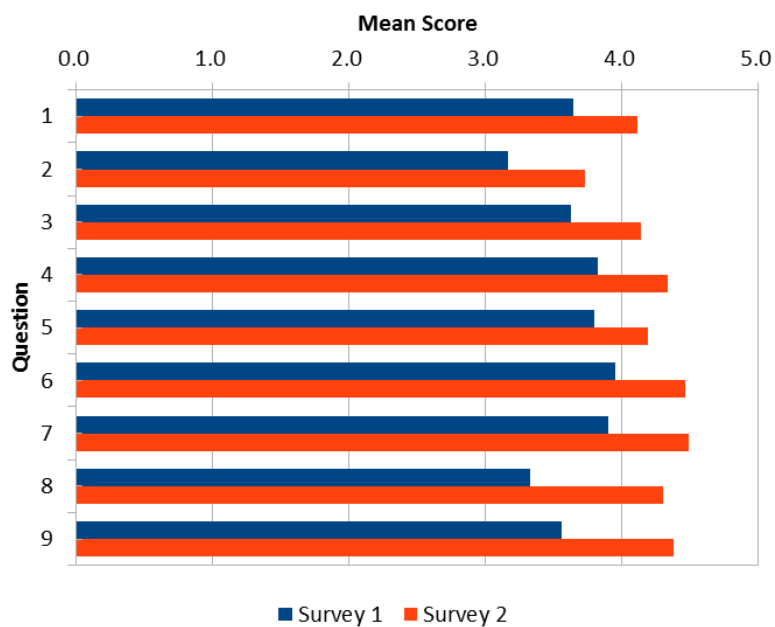


Figure 14. Client 3, Surveys 1 and 2 Compared

In this sermon, Mark showed improvement in every category of the quantitative section, and those improvements were statistically significant. In every category, but one (question 5 “The preacher effectively illustrated the main point of the text”), people’s favorably response to Mark’s preaching increased by at least .5 point of mean

²⁰ His second survey response rate was better than Ann’s and David’s (roughly 75% compared to 50% respectively).

improvement, or more. Mark's progress was most obvious in people's favorable input regarding "The preacher's choice of words" (question 7, increased by .6), his "eye contact across the congregation" (question 8, increase by 1.0), his "gestures and facial expressions" (question 9, increased by .8). Since the second survey had failed to give clear indication of improvement in Ann's and David's cases, I thought to include two questions of improvement directly in Mark's survey form. In the quantitative section, we added a question 10, asking people to respond to the statement, "Mark's preaching has improved in the last two years." To this people responded enthusiastically, with just under two-thirds of respondents indicating that they "strongly agree."

In the qualitative section, we asked respondents to specify "In what areas has Mark's preaching improved?" People's responses can be summarized in two categories: confidence and clarity. Twenty-three people noted improvement in Mark's demeanor in the pulpit, which they labeled as either general "confidence" or "comfort." That seems to have been conveyed in Mark's increased eye contact with the congregation (noted by six people) and stronger use of his voice and inflection (named by five people). This enabled him to express his passion (identified by four), and gave the impression of connecting with the congregation (four people). Under clarity, eleven people noted the improved "focus" and "flow" to Mark's sermons, or as one person put it "sticking to the point and not going around and around." Another respondent noted that Mark's preaching grew "deeper and more thoughtful," and asked, "more preparation?" Mark shared his response with me, "Not more preparation, but much

smarter preparation.” One person gave an apt summary of the above, “[Mark] has developed his own style.”

A comparison of the qualitative portions of the two surveys indicated this in several ways. First, a comparison of people’s responses to question 17, “Was there anything distracting about the preacher’s presentation?” reveals significant improvement. In the first survey, twenty-one people identified specific distractions in Mark’s presentation, with the most people noting his lack of eye-contact with the congregation (eleven people) and poor speaking pace and voice inflection (eight people). In Mark’s second sermon, only two people noted distractions. One person noted that the presentation seemed too quick, while another thought the content seemed more like two sermons than one.

People’s responses to the question “What would make the sermon stronger?” also revealed significant improvement between the two sermons. People’s suggestions basically fell into the same categories. Most people’s suggestions had to do with Mark’s presentation. In the first sermon, eighteen people suggested Mark improve his speaking volume, pace or inflection. In the second sermon, only five did, and no one identified volume as an issue. In the first sermon, fourteen people recommended that Mark learn to lift his eyes from his notes and make eye contact with the congregation, while the second time around only five people still identified that as an issue. On “passion” and “dynamism,” Mark got advice from thirteen people in the first sermon, while in the second sermon he heard the same from only two people. On issues related to the coherence of the sermon, nine people offered suggestions for the first sermon, but only

one person did in the second. The measure of improvement from the congregation was clear and overwhelming.

Mark and I conducted our exit Interview on June 24, 2015. I began by asking questions about his impressions of the coaching approach, starting with “what have you enjoyed most from our interactions over the last years?” Mark began by underlining the relational aspect of coaching. “It was collegial.” It helped him stay focused, “You always kept it centered on goals and the interaction allowed for me to realize where I needed to focus on what was important. I was able to self-realize what I needed to work on.” It seems that coaching allowed for collegial interaction, which kept things focused and goal-oriented, while also creating space for Mark to “self-realize” where he needed to put his focus. That’s the unique power of asking (rather than telling) to both focus a person’s thought and empower their own discovery and self-efficacy. He reiterated that point when asked “what was most helpful about my style of serving?” He recalled instances where, “I’m thinking really hard and you were keeping the rails up which kept me from getting off track...but you didn’t do it in a pedantic way or with negative reinforcement.” I did it by asking questions that kept the focus on the goal at hand.

When asked what seemed unhelpful or unfamiliar about coaching, Mark named two things. First, “when you said, ‘How would you say that in a sentence’ that felt unhelpful at the time, but it was really helpful. It was really hard work, but it was a good thing.” We had to do that exercise many times in the early months of coaching, when he would express himself using abstract words and indefinite phrases. It was, however, a discipline of thought he soon adopted for himself with great benefit for his ability to

articulate an idea clearly and concisely. The second unfamiliar aspect of coaching was the challenge of trying to integrate the sermon coaching course into the other priorities and tasks of the Field Education supervisory relationship. “I had to mentally change gears from school stuff and field-ed stuff to sermons. That was a challenge for me.” That is a valid point of critique for the coaching model used in Mark’s case. The Sermon Coaching Course would function better were coach and client not also working on other projects together, which compete for time and attention. Nevertheless, the coaching model was able to adapt to that challenging situation. Mark gave the course a “10” for its focus on what was important to him, saying:

There were days when I couldn’t focus [on the sermon] and we ended up talking about what I needed to talk about in hindsight. You would listen to me and realize that there was something else going on that I needed to work through and you managed to work through that [instead of] the other topic we were scheduled to talk about.

Next, I inquired about the effectiveness of the program, as a whole. Mark rated the value of the course as a “10.” The thing he found most helpful was the non-directive character of coaching, “The ability to be myself and understand myself and improve my effectiveness.” He elaborated:

I didn’t have to change who I was, but refine who I am. You started with where I am and I didn’t have to change who I am to adapt to a system. I could fine tune what I’m doing. You were working with me without saying “Do these 10 Things” and that allowed me to really change. It bled into other parts of my life as I was getting enhanced in this narrow area of life I was able to adapt it to other areas. I always appreciated that you never gave me the idea.

Mark put his finger on the unique power of coaching, which Stoltzfus described as “Helping people change without telling them what to do.” It starts by recognizing the client as a whole person created, called, and equipped by God, within whom is a whole

world of opportunities for growth and change. The coach's job is to explore and discover that with the client, helping the client articulate, prioritize and act on his unique calling from God. In our relationship Mark experienced the coach "working with me without saying 'Do these 10 Things.'" By asking, rather than telling, I was able to help Mark discover "the system" on his own. As he said, "that allowed me to really change," in ways more deep and long-lasting than traditional learning techniques like instruction and advice. Coaching enhances the responsibility of the learner and results in a high degree of ownership over the results. Mark experience embodied Tschannen-Moran's description of the results of evocative coaching: "The joys of discovery, the passion born of self-efficacy, the cultivation of trust, and the invigoration that comes from shifting energy and direction."²¹

Next, we discussed the results of coaching for Mark. I asked "How have you changed your sermon preparation?" He said, "It's 180 degrees different" and then launched a trenchant critique of his process early sermons, before the coaching course:

I realized I wasn't really doing a lot of sermon preparation. I was doing a lot of preparation but it wasn't effective in preparing material to preach. I was basically telling the story of my process of interpretation of the text. I didn't really have a method. I was just using scattershot reading in the commentaries to see what I could find and consolidate it down to a story I could tell about what [the commentaries] are trying to say and what the scripture said. It was a lot of time for a very limited product. It didn't do a lot for the hearers. I wasn't really thinking about them in my preparation process.

He then compared his early sermons to a recent experience he had preaching in his home church:

There were people who were stopping me after my recent sermon at my home church who were just blown away with how much better I am. Like eyes wide

²¹ Tschannen-Moran, *Evocative Coaching*, xxi.

open and mouth agape [asking], “What did you do to Mark Riley?” People who knew me for years couldn’t believe how much I’ve improved. They were saying, “You had the gift, but it was raw, and now you are figuring it out.”

Those changes in preparation flowed into changed delivery, which Mark described in these terms: “My intentionality and emphasis have changed drastically. Less words. Richer examples. Less is more. [Better] pacing and pausing. Not trying to fit 10 pounds of stuff in a five pound bag.” The results speak eloquently for themselves of the effective combination of the Robinson “method” and the use of coaching to help inculcate it.

To gauge the client’s learning of the Ten Stages, I asked, “What new perspectives, concepts, techniques or information did you gain about preaching?” What he gained was formation in a rigorous thought process the Ten Stage prep questions:

In the beginning, it seemed really arduous because I was answering the same question over and over again. But I realized that the approach was to funnel the thoughts and message down so it has impact. Knowing that you had to take time to go through them made me more diligent in preparing. I started to realize that skipping some questions was not helpful. Though it sounded like I was asking the same questions I realized that each question builds on the next, from a different perspective.

Coaching facilitated the sustained, arduous practice it took for the prep questions to show their full value and for Mark to become accustomed to asking them on his own. I asked, “What questions do you ask and answer to move from the scripture text to a completed sermon?” His answer was quite clear, “Every one of them on the page, prep question 1-10.” He then demonstrated mastery of them with a pithy summary: “What is this passage trying to say? Why was it important then? Why is it important now? And

what difference does that make in our lives? Tell me that in a sentence.” Mark had grasped it!

Client 3 Conclusions

Mark made huge progress through the preaching course. Mark, himself, recognized this improvement, as did survey respondents in his Field Education congregation, as well as people in his home church. In large part, this is attributable to Mark’s adoption of Robinson’s Ten Stages. Mark said:

I walked away and realized that I got everything I was hoping for and more. Having Haddon Robinson’s principles and way of thinking I now use that for everything. When I write a report for my Rector about a pastoral care visit I use Robinson’s questions to organize my thoughts. I do it every day. That consistency of questioning and coming up with answers has helped me in a lot of places. In preaching I would have done it just like everyone else, sat down and read commentaries and wondered what I want to preach, but now I think it through methodically.

As he indicated in the exit interview, coaching facilitated Mark in adopting that approach and building it into his weekly habits of sermon preparation.

It must be noted, however, that the client’s transformation was not due to coaching alone. The addition of mentoring and modeling and critique, as well as the classroom homiletical instruction Mark was receiving as a seminary student, exercised additional influence that partially accounts for Mark’s successful improvement as a preacher. This, of course, demonstrates the adaptability of coaching, but it also makes it tricky to isolate the influence of coaching from these other influences for the sake of evaluating the coaching approach (see below). Mark’s case serves to show, not only the adaptability of coaching to fit different people’s circumstances, but also how coaching

can be utilized along with mentoring, critique and classroom instruction to train new preachers as part of a larger program of formation.

Mark's progress helps to illustrate several coaching principles and techniques:

1. Questions help bring clarity. Mark commented repeatedly on impact an inquiring approach had in forcing him to think and articulate clearly. Telling a person that they need to do that, or advising them how to do it, either end up relieving them of the responsibility of actually doing so, or stimulating resistance
2. Begin with the person. One of the things Mark most appreciated about the coaching course is "you started with me where I am," and in the end helped him "develop my own style."
3. Accentuate the positive. Although the first year of coaching with Mark involved a lot of "mentoring" (critique and directive input) to improve his preaching, in the end, Mark recalled favorably how the coaching experience "built on my strengths" and "lifts up your positives."
4. Provide a flexible framework. Coaching offers a framework of thought that guides the client to "self-realize" what they need to focus on.
5. Real change comes from within. In contrast to traditional approaches to training and education that rely on the mentor or teacher instructing and offering advice to the learner, coaching relies on asking, rather than telling. In Mark's case, this empowered him to discover "the system" on his own,

and “that allowed me to really change,” by enhancing his responsibility and ownership over the results.

Client 4: Kate

Kate was in her early forties when she participated in the coaching course. She had been the part-time pastor of a small, rural congregation with an average of forty people attending on Sundays. In our opening session, Kate and I shared our stories and our sense of calling, and some of the challenges we face. We quickly built good rapport and transparency and spent some time discussing a recent and significant family tragedy that was looming large in her life, and explored the role that might play in our coaching relationship. In the next session, we talked about her approach to preaching. She was preaching every week, was enjoying it, and felt she was doing a good job at it. She described having a good memory of what she wants to say so it is easy to talk without notes, standing in the aisle, connecting eye-to-eye with the congregation. She made good use of stories to hold the congregation’s attention and make the sermon relevant. Her core message is “God loves us so incredibly much. It’s all about grace. It’s mind-blowing. I can’t hear it enough, and I can’t say it enough. I want people to get that point, then they’ll be moved to behave in a more loving way, with self-control, non-judgmental. Obeying the rules will follow.” In the twelve years she’s served her church, she could see the effects of her preaching and pastoral care. “People are still stubborn, but not angry, suspicious, and nasty anymore.”

Kate was generally satisfied with her sermon preparation and had a disciplined process to do it, describing herself as a “sermon mill.” She put fifteen to twenty hours a week into her pastoral ministry and probably nine hours into her sermon preparation. She started at lunch-time on Monday every week studying the lectionary scripture texts, reading the Synthesis commentary series, and taking notes. On Tuesday, she took two to four hours to “hash out the thesis” of the sermon. When asked what that looks like, she described that process with an example from the sermon she was working on that week on Paul’s conversion. She focused on Paul being plunged into darkness and how God gave him sight: “seeing in the dark.” With the thesis in-hand, she next worked to “tease out the relevance speaking to us now” and figure out the movement of the sermon. She liked to sprinkle in a joke, an illustration, a final exhortation or encouragement. On Wednesday, she took a few hours to write out the bullet-points and “fill out the skeleton” of the sermon of the sermon and then put it away. On Saturday, she condensed the outline onto a half page of paper and put it in her prayer book for quick reference. On Sunday morning, she ran through the sermon for about an hour before preaching to the congregation. This process produced the good results described above, though Kate expressed some uncertainty. “I don’t know my blind-spots.” That was a perfect tee-up for the sermon survey.

In our third session, Kate and I talked about conducting the survey as a way to identify potential blind-spots. She conducted the survey on Sunday, May 22, 2013 and received nearly 100% response rate from the congregation. Their enthusiasm for the sermon was nearly unanimous. We worked hard in the analysis of the survey results to

glean any information that might expose a blind-spot in Kate's preaching. We could not, but did come up with two potential areas for improvement. One person observed that her voice "trails off at the end of a point." She could work on that. In the qualitative section, people she was interested in people's responses to questions ten and eleven, regarding the "main idea" of the sermon and the "main action" it advocated for the congregation. By her count, seven respondents got an "A" grade in recounting the idea and action, and fifteen people got a "B". She wanted to improve that and identified greater clarity as one area for improvement, making sure her illustrations reinforce the main point of the sermon. She said she would think more about potential areas for improvement.

When we met for the next session to continue analysis of the survey and identifying areas of improvement, she shared her decision to not continue coaching. With all the other challenges in her life, "sermon crafting isn't my highest priority right now. My sermons are good enough and God is blessing them." I could sense her motivation waning in the previous session as we analyzed the results and tried to put our finger on potential goals. In the intervening weeks, she decided that the perceived benefit of coaching, "sermon crafting," did not make the time investment worthwhile, given the other priorities she was juggling at the time. She discontinued her participation in the project. The success of coaching is largely dependent on the motivation level of the client, which, in this case, was waning. We decided to discontinue the coaching relationship.

Client 5: Anne

We began on May 8, 2013, and during the time of our coaching relationship, Anne was the associate pastor of a large urban church with over six hundred people in attendance, on average, every weekend. She was in her mid-thirties and had been with that congregation for three years, preaching roughly every six weeks. We built good rapport in our first session by sharing life stories, values and challenges. When I opened the conversation about her vision and values of preaching, Anne briefly mentioned valuing the opportunity to bring people to “the point of transformation” in her sermons. She quickly changed the subject to issues related to her preparation of sermons. She described herself as a “horrible procrastinator” and wanted to “develop some new preparatory process and gain some accountability, develop a rhythm of preparation.” In addition, she was interested in “learning more about perceived outcomes people are walking away with. I’m looking for ways of generating feedback within the congregation.” Those sounded like good areas for improvement emerging very early in the process.

In the next session, we talked more about her sermon preparation process and began to identify areas for improvement. She was interested in starting her preparation process earlier, developing a better “focus statement” for the sermon, gaining greater clarity on what people’s “takeaway” will be for each sermon, and bringing fewer notes with her into the pulpit. In June, we discussed the sermon survey and began planning how to do it. Since the church is so large, she decided to gather a representative survey group of twelve to eighteen people, consisting of a variety of ages, both genders, some

fans as well as people she doesn't know very well, and people covering a spectrum of longevity within the congregation. She would also ask the rector to suggest some candidates. We had a plan to conduct the sermon Survey in early August, but due to a variety of reasons, we did not meet again for the next ten weeks, on August 28.

From this point on, our coaching sessions became sporadic, given Anne's extremely demanding schedule. When we met in late August, we reconnected well. Anne was eager to talk about the sermon she was to preach that coming Sunday, but did not have time to discuss the survey. We met again in late September, after a four-week interval, and Anne shared how overwhelmed she was with "Fall Panic." Her program responsibilities in her church pushed everything else to the side. As a result, "I've lost track of this preaching stuff." She wouldn't be able to even think about conducting the survey until November, and wanted to use our time together to work on the up-coming sermon she was preparing. We were able to meet again on December 4, but she had issues to discuss other than her preaching. We spent that session talking about several large-scale questions related to life, vocation, income and location. She was at a cross-roads and needed to think through some big decisions. The mind-set, skills and techniques of coaching were well-suited for me to support her in this conversation and I suggested that "coaching isn't just for sermons." I described what "life-coaching might look like and she was interested in hearing more. Our next meeting was on January 15, and by that time she had decided to step away from parochial ministry and explore other options. We ended the Sermon Coaching course and began doing "life-purpose coaching."

The coaching experience with Anne demonstrates the importance of the client's motivation. As her work-load increased and her path in life changed, sermon coaching became less important to her. That waning motivation resulted in less frequent coaching sessions and neglect of the difficult task of conducting the sermon survey, and eventually in changing the focus to other issues of greater importance to her. This experience also demonstrates the adaptability of the coaching approach to whatever is most important and challenging to the client.

Final Conclusions

Each client that completed the course achieved their goals, in large part, and was able to assimilate Robinson's Ten Stages, in whole, or in part. Client 1, Ann, focused our time together mostly on preparing for her next sermon. Along the way, she was able to implement six of her eight goals. She figured out and adopted several of Robinson's Ten Stages, without ever having heard of him, based solely on the coach's inquiring approach. She valued:

Your questioning and the urge[ing] to dig deeper into the passage, and helping me find ways to relate the [biblical] context to the preaching text. I took notes on the questions you asked and now I ask myself the questions I need to think through in the sermon writing process.

Client 2, David, was very goal-oriented and reached each of his three goals in a very systematic way. Though he did not feel he had completed work on his final goal, he could round each base and continue working on them after the completion of the course. I was able to introduce Robinson's book at a critical moment when David was struggling with moving from idea to outline. It was the right book at the right time, and

David fully adopted the Ten Stages into his sermon preparation process. Robinson was a decisive resource for David, helping him achieve his goals. He said in the exit interview:

You ask lots of good questions. You've done a very good job of letting me muddle through, without jumping in and telling me how to do something. It's been a real clarifying process for me and you've made that possible by being patient and trusting the process and not trying to squeeze the results out.

Client 3, Mark, and I took a hybrid approach to our nearly two-year coaching relationship. The first year followed more of a mentoring model with coaching techniques sprinkled in. In year two, it became a purer coaching approach. The results were very good. Mark achieved all his goals and made across-the-board improvements that were clearly recognized by the congregation. In a moment when Mark was stuck on how to develop the author's idea, I offered my Sermon Prep Questions, which are based on Robinson's Ten Stages, which he readily adopted into his sermon preparation process and were an enormous help in achieving his goals. He said of the coaching approach:

I didn't have to change who I was, but refine who I am. You started with where I am and I didn't have to change who I am to adapt to a system. I could fine-tune what I'm doing. You were working with me without saying "Do these 10 Things" and that allowed me to really change. It bled into other parts of my life. As I was getting enhanced in this narrow area of life I was able to adapt it to other areas. I always appreciated that you never gave me the idea.

In the cases of Client 4 Client 5, Kate and Anne respectively, the coaching approach enabled each to discern and follow their priorities away from the sermon coaching course. In Kate's case, her full schedule made the benefit of sermon coaching was not sufficient for her to justify the time investment. In Anne's case, her direction in life made sermon coaching less relevant to her than life coaching. The coaching

approach was able to serve her well in that other direction. In both cases, coaching demonstrated its efficiency and flexibility as a way to serve people in ways that are meaningful to them.

From each of these case studies, we can summarize how coaching each client demonstrated the effectiveness of coaching principles and techniques:

1. Relationships change lives. Coaching relies on an affirming relationship to increase a person's self-confidence and forward momentum. To Ann, this was the most enjoyable and effective part of the coaching experience. David experienced the same thing. At the beginning of the course, he was enthusiastic about "the common ground we share." At the end, he attributed "being able to talk with someone" about the difficulties of sermon preparation as a big part of his improvement.
2. The person is the source. Basic to the coaching mind-set is that each person is created by God and as a divine image-bearer, has vast worth, which the coach must honor by discovering the depths inside the person waiting to be discovered. The coach doesn't add value, but draws it forth. One of the things Mark most appreciated about the coaching course is "you started with me where I am," and in the end helped him "develop my own style."
3. The client sets the agenda. Focusing on one's own priorities strengthens motivation, so in coaching, the client always sets the agenda. That principle was proven by both Ann and David, who both gave the course a "10" for focusing on what was important to them. In Ann's case, we altered the

process because she preferred to skip the S.M.A.R.T. process to refine her goals and get to work on her sermons. In David's case, he invested great effort in refining his goals and stayed focused in each session on achieving them. In both cases, we followed the client's agenda, resulting in, as David said, "motivating and empowering... my own desire for improvement."

4. A positive approach gives hope. Accentuating the positive turns problems into solutions. Early in the process, both David and Mark were discouraged and overwhelmed by their difficulties preparing and delivering sermons, but coaching gave them hope of taking action to make fundamental changes. That change began with envisioning an ideal future, translating that into goals, and then planning actions to achieve those goals. Coach and client then share the journey of making action into habits that solve the problems identified at the beginning. In the end, Mark recalled how coaching "built on my strengths" and "lifts up your positives."
5. Goals direct change. For Ann, the power of setting goals was proven early in the course in the results of her first survey and ran through its duration. Though perhaps her goals could have been made "smarter," they nevertheless helped Ann to focus from the very beginning and persistently pursue specific changes in her preaching.
6. There is power in small wins. Coaching seeks to foster momentum by generating "many little wins." Tangible results are a great reward for prolonged effort and motivates further effort. Ann bore witness to this

dynamic, speaking favorably of the forward-looking, results-oriented character of the course. David expressed repeatedly being excited by the changes he was making during the course. Those “small wins” quickly changed the atmosphere of his preparation process from being full of anxiety to being exciting and hopeful and characterized by a growing momentum for improvement.

7. Responsibility rests with the client. David noticed how different coaching was from other forms of homiletical training he has experienced before. It wasn’t “top-down” instruction or critique, but was “self-directed” and forced him to “figure it out for myself.” By assuming that the client is the expert, the coach is freed from the burden of giving advice, much of which would likely miss the mark.
8. A flexible framework of thought is key. Coaching offers a framework of thought that guides the client to, in Mark’s words, “self-realize” what they need to focus on. The same is true of Robinson’s Ten Stages. It is all about inculcating a thought process. When combined together, coaching provides a thought process for helping the client figure out and adopt and adapt? the Ten Stages for himself. David noticed the result. He learned to “think like a preacher” without me ever having to tell him how.
9. Real change comes from within. In contrast to traditional approaches to training and education, rely on the mentor or teacher instructing and offering advice to the learner, coaching relies on asking, rather than telling.

Though it takes more time to ask questions that draw forth content, the client's learning is more deeply seated than if the content is offered as advice or instruction. By suggesting the Ten Stages to Ann as a series of questions in the context of her sermon preparation, she was able to absorb them into her own process. In Mark's case, this empowered him to discover "the system" on his own, and "that allowed me to really change," by enhancing his responsibility and ownership over the results.

10. Powerful questions draw important things to the surface. In Ann's case, an inquiring approach helped her generate a wealth of insight into the texts she was studying and into the congregation she was communicating with. Early in the coaching course, David struggled with coaching questions, which forced him to state what he felt like were "obvious" matters. In hind-sight, though, the exercise in "trying to articulate my thoughts" helped to surface implicit values and assumptions that could then be examined and acted upon. It allowed more fundamental change. Mark commented repeatedly on how the inquiring approach forced him to think and articulate in a more disciplined and clear way.

11. The client becomes the coach. The coach's goal is to work himself out of a job by empowering the client to become their own coach. In Ann's case, she began to ask herself the questions repeatedly raised by the coach, eventually turning them into a regular habit in her sermon preparation process. The coach models behaviors that equip the client, as David said, "to continue my

own improvement.” Though we were not able to fully address his final goal, David seemed confident of his ability to maintain the momentum of improvement.

Conclusions about the Program

The adaptability of coaching. The coaching methodology had very good outcomes for the three different clients who completed the course, in three very different circumstances. Though the principles and techniques varied from client to client, that variation was small. Most of the principles applied to each client, though in a way adapted to their priorities and needs. Because people differ in their values, priorities, skill-set and pace, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to facilitating their learning. The coaching discipline has inherent flexibility to facilitate learning and change in a wide variety of people. Mark’s case hints at how mentoring and coaching approaches can work together to train new preachers one-on-one.

The final survey as a tool for measuring improvement. The final survey was not an adequate method for gauging progress over the year-long coaching course. David said of his final survey, “Even if my survey results weren’t knock-it-out-of-the-park I am a better preacher now and am set up to become a better preacher going forward. It’s moving in a much better direction than when we started.” A more effective way to measure improvement would be to use a focus group, like Mark did. Mark had a “Lay Committee” selected from people in the congregation, which met with him on a monthly basis during the school year, to share his learning journey and support his

learning. He included them in his “Impact” goals as a help to measure progress. Though I did not include them in this study in any formal way, hindsight indicates that formalizing a focus group to measure a client’s progress through the course would be effective.

Single-focus course format. The course is best suited to a relationship with a singular focus on preaching, rather than Mark’s situation of a multi-focus relationship, in which coaching sessions easily devolved into multi-tasking with other topics.

Client endorsements. Perhaps the strongest measure of the effectiveness of the course is how the participants would endorse it to their colleagues. At the end of the exit interview I asked “How would you describe sermon coaching to your clergy colleagues?” In reply to that question, Ann – who is not one to overstate the case – replied, “It’s a really great way to improve or change your preaching style.” When asked what made it really great, she made this straightforward reply: “It’s been effective for me.” David was more expressive and expansive:

It is an excellent process I would highly recommend. It is hard work and requires a lot of self-reflection and self-evaluation. It’s not Tom picking apart your sermon. It’s been so process-oriented and that’s been very helpful. My goals have been focused on the process of preparation, not so much on the finished product. It’s coming from a different angle of approach. It’s not critiquing your sermons, but a more fundamental approach to developing how you prepare sermons. That makes it an enormously beneficial process. When you told me about the program I was instantly interested and I really hoped it would work out. It really did work well.

Mark had even more to say:

It really takes a hard look at what you are doing and lifts up your positives and helps you understand your negatives so you can minimize them. It’s huge. If I’m doing something poorly at least I know I’m doing it. If you have concerns about your preaching it’s probably well-founded. People in your congregation aren’t

necessarily going to tell you. If you wonder about your preaching, coaching is probably worth looking into. It's like the lady who told me she doesn't wear her hearing aids to church because she doesn't care if she misses the sermon. For the role of Rector, preaching is so important to everything we're trying to do in ministry. It's the only time you get to speak to all these people every week. Probably want to work on that one. I hate to hear people talk about their priest, "He's not much of a preacher but he was good at pastoral care." You want to be good at both. Coaching identifies your strengths and weaknesses and gives you a process to improve the good and the bad. It's hard, but the last thing I want to do is not improve because nobody told me. It's adaptable to people no matter where they are coming from. I was really surprised that my class mates and colleagues are horrified at the thought of doing a sermon survey. "Why would you want to do that? Why open that can of worms." If you love these people it seems like you'd want to find out how to serve them better. I hope this catches on.

When asked, on a scale of 1-10, how interested he was in getting trained to be sermon coach, Mark answered:

In five years, I'd be 8 or 9 interested because it is important enough for people to learn to do. It would be worth working towards because I think it's that important. Clergy isolation is a slippery slope that a lot of people are on that ends up eating them alive. Coaching is a great way to lessen that isolation and help people improve their skills.

Given the success each client experienced, who finished the course, in defining and achieving their goals, we can conclude that coaching is an effective way of helping preachers improve. Given the hand-in-glove way the coaching approach utilized Robinson's Ten Stages in three different ways according the different values and needs of the client, we may conclude that coaching is an effective educational approach to inculcating the Robinson system in preachers seeking to improve. Furthermore, in Mark's case, a possible androgogical approach is evident for using both mentoring and coaching approaches to train new preachers in the Robinson method. Given the enthusiastic response from participants, we may conclude that word-of-mouth could be

an important factor in attracting new clients for prospective sermon coaches. Mark's words at the end of his exit interview indicate a potential source of future sermon coaches. There is nothing like the experience of being coached to inspire some to become coaches. John Dewey said a teacher should adopt inquiry "as his basic mode of discourse" because questions are like "instruments to open engaged minds to unsuspected possibilities." Such a teacher "measures success in terms of behavioral changes in students."²² We have seen the truth of that observation borne out at every step in the Sermon Coaching Course.

Final Conclusions

Most preachers need to improve. Some recognize that fact and are willing to invest time and money to do so. For those motivated preachers, the means of improvement are no longer inaccessible, or ineffective. This study has developed a one-year coaching course that has been demonstrated to be effective and can easily be made available to help preachers improve. It has demonstrated that fact by, first, rooting the mind-set, skills, and techniques of Christian coaching within the Biblical narrative. Having surveyed the biblical narrative, we discovered the context within which "coaching" makes sense and brought to the surface its principles and techniques from within the drama of creation, fall and redemption. We surveyed the work of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit interacting with humanity to help people fulfill their calling

²² Quoted in Knowles, Holton, Swanson *The Adult Learner*, 100.

to loving relationships, a sweeping destiny, taking responsibility for their lives. Chapter two showed the role that Christian coaching can play in helping people fulfill each of those callings. There is more work that can be done in the future to deepen and expand that scriptural and theological study. There were several themes that had to be left out of chapter two because of issues of length and focus. With that rich rooting in the biblical narrative, we turned to contemporary theoretical work in four distinct fields of research: behavior change, Appreciative Inquiry, adult learning, and secular coaching. At every turn, we found the discipline of coaching and the Sermon Coaching Course strongly validated and greatly enriched by the various insights and imperatives of these diverse disciplines, as documented in chapter three.

Second, this study further demonstrated the effectiveness and availability of coaching by conducting a course of sermon coaching with five coaching clients, over a one-year period. Chapter four documented how the course unfolded in the case of one client, and offered that as an illustration of, and guide to how sermon coaching can work with other clients. Chapter five then documented each client's path of improvement, highlighting the coaching principles that were operative and measuring their real-life results. The coaching course was thus validated from a theoretical point of view, and was proven to work over the course of a year in the lives of five clients. The Sermon Coaching Course developed in this study can be used to train other coaches to serve preachers who are motivated to improve.

Third, this study can become the basis for a coaching program that employs multiple trained coaches to support preachers and churches in the future. Much has

been written on the importance of preaching. When preaching is ineffective, the church is too. When preaching improves, so will the churches' influence on the world.

Coaching can improve preaching so that:

1. Preachers will be more effective and satisfied in their ministry.
2. People in their congregations will be more likely learn, live and share the Gospel.
3. Congregations will be more effective in mission to make disciples of all nations.

This thesis has demonstrated that coaching will make measurable improvement in preaching and will thus empower the church to change the world. All that remains is to train coaches and gather clients.

APPENDIX A

SURVEY

Dear Colleague,

As a pastor who preaches regularly, I know the challenges of developing messages for my congregation week after week. As a D.Min. candidate, I've been working to improve my preaching over the last few years. In the year ahead, I'm studying ***how to help others improve***, for my Doctoral Thesis Project exploring how a "coaching" approach can help preachers improve.

If you can spare three minutes to fill out the enclosed survey card, you can help me in a big way.

I want to get a sense of how important preaching is to those who are doing it, and to gauge their level of satisfaction with their performance. I'd also like to connect for future collaboration with preachers who are motivated to improve.

In the year ahead, I plan to select three preachers willing to help me "beta test" my sermon coaching program for my Doctoral Thesis. You'll benefit from free coaching. After that, I'll build a client base for my services as a professionally certified "Sermon Coach." I'd love to serve you.

Please take three minutes to answer the questions on the enclosed a survey card and drop it in the mail. If you'd like to learn more about working with me in the future, put your name and email address in the space allotted and I'll be in touch. You can count on full confidentiality.

Seeking to Serve,

The Rev. Tom Simmons

- 1 2 3 4 5
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

- 1 2 3 4 5
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

- 1 2 3 4 5
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

- 1 2 3 4 5
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

- Please write your name and email

At the Fall Clergy Retreat in October I distributed 86 survey forms and received 72 responses. Below are the survey questions and a summary and analysis of the responses.

- 1 2 3 4 5
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

2. I am satisfied with the outcomes of my preaching.

- 1 2 3 4 5
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

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3. I am satisfied with my process of preparing sermons.

4. I am willing to invest time and money to improve my preaching

5. I would like to learn more about improving my preaching.

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APPENDIX B

A COACH'S GUIDE TO HADDON ROBINSON'S TEN STAGES

Prep Question 1 Is this Scripture text a “unit of thought?”

Does it have a single overarching idea, which encompasses the other supporting ideas?

How much material in this text is tied to ideas in verses that precede the text or follow it?

Prep Question 2 If you could interview the author what would you ask about this passage?

Who, what, when, where, how is the author talking about?

What issues was the author dealing with?

What is the author passionate about? How can you tell?

What is the author's flow of thought?

What figures of speech does the author employ?

What do they mean?

What does the author want the intended audience to think or do differently?

Prep Question 3 What is the author's idea in this passage?

1) The Subject: what is the author talking about?

2) The Complement: what does the author say about the subject?

How would you summarize it into one compact, comprehensive sentence?

How does the author support that idea in the passage?

Fallen Condition Focus.

What human concern or need caused the Holy Spirit to inspire this text in the author?

What grace from God is being offered in this passage to address this human concern?

How are we to respond to that grace?

Prep Question 4 How will you develop the Author's Idea for your congregation?

What do you need to **explain** for them? Anticipating people's questions beforehand, what kind of information will they need to understand the passage?

What do you need to **prove** to them? Anticipating people's objections or skepticism, what case do you need to make to persuade them about the passage?

What do you need to **apply** to them? Anticipating people's disconnect between ideas and action, how can you help people see what difference this passage can make? How will you relate it to their lives? How have you experienced this?

Prep Question 5 How would you restate the author's ancient idea for your audience today?

How could you make that clearer?

How could you make that more concrete?

How could you make that more vivid?

How could you make that more concise?

How could you make that more memorable?

Prep Question 6 What is the purpose of this sermon? What would you like to change in your hearers as a result of it?

What do those words mean?

What do you want them to feel, think, and do?

Can you be more specific?

How would you measure that impact?

How will you know that they are doing that?

Prep Question 7 How will you unfold the Sermon Idea within the sermon?

Will you state the idea from the beginning then explain, persuade and/or apply it through the body of the sermon? (Deductive)

Will you raise a question or problem at the beginning and help people discover the idea by the end of the sermon? (Inductive)

Will you raise the question at the beginning, answer it in the middle, then explain, persuade and/or apply it in the latter half of the sermon. (De- Inductive)

Prep Question 8 What is the structure of your sermon?

What are the large movements you want to make from beginning to end?

What will you say to transition between each of them?

What sub points will you make to support each large movement?

Prep Question 9 What sort of supporting material would you like to use to explain, prove, apply or amplify the points of your outline?

What kind of material do you have available that will fix a truth firmly in the hearer's mind, make it believable, apply ideas to people's experience and shows them "how to do it"?

Define – establishing limits of what your idea means or doesn't mean.

What factual information will support that point?

Do you have any good quotes?

Can you describe the situation in which people might live this out?

How could you tell that story so they can see it?

Prep Question 10 How are you going to introduce and conclude this sermon?

If I'm your hearer, how will you get my attention?

How will you touch on a need or question that I have?

How will you prepare me what's to come in the sermon?

How are you going to conclude the sermon?

Are there any loose ends from your introduction that you want tie down in the conclusion?

If I'm your hearer, what key idea or ideas do you want to reinforce from your message?

What's the biggest impression you want me to leave with?

What do you want me to do?

How will you make that memorable and motivating?

APPENDIX C
CLIENT STARTER PACKET

Welcome Letter

Dear Client

I'm quite enthused by your interest in working to improve your preaching and honored by your trust in me to share that journey with you.

In the initial sessions I hope we can lay a good foundation for our relationship by each sharing a few significant life stories about our formation as a person, a disciple of Jesus, and as a preacher. It would be helpful for me if you could complete a MBTI personality assessment so I can adapt my approach to your personality preferences.

After that I'd like to explore your approach to preaching, and learn about your preaching context. I have a handy survey to use with your congregation to help you invite feedback on a sermon you'll preach. The time we invest at the beginning of the course reflecting on your preaching, and analyzing the results of your congregational survey will help identify specific areas you'd like to focus on for improvement.

Then, in subsequent months, we'll work on those areas you identify. I'll help you articulate your goals and to translate them into action that will transform how you prepare and deliver sermons. Along the way I suspect we'll have opportunity to explore, if you desire to, deeper issues of life and faith and ministry as they relate to preaching.

I'm eager to get started. To begin, please:

- 1) Read, sign and send the Coaching Agreement attached. It simply names the agreed-upon expectations we each share in our coaching relationship for the months ahead.
- 2) Review your calendar. Do you have time on Wednesday afternoons to meet for our regular meeting time twice a month?
- 3) Do the Meyers-Briggs and forward me the results.

When would you like to get started with our first session together?

Sincerely,

COACHING AGREEMENT

Client:

Coach:

Date:

Coach Responsibilities:

As your coach, I want to help you grow, change, develop and achieve your goals as a preacher and pastor and leader in your congregation. While I will share the journey with you, encouraging you to press on toward your goals, you are responsible for your life, and you will make the choices about what actions to take and what we work on together.

As your coach, I will provide support, accountability, perspective, challenge and resources for you to achieve you goals. I'll ask God to help me see you with God's eyes and I will consistently and enthusiastically believe in you as you reach towards your destiny in Jesus. I will ask you to regularly reflect on your progress and will at times ask you to choose action steps to take before our next appointment.

Client Responsibilities:

I will take initiative, and with my coach's help, I will define our agenda and my growth goals as guided by my own values and priorities. I want progress in my life and am willing to invest time and energy between sessions and to try new approaches in order to meet my goals. I commit to honesty in this coaching relationship because I understand that the degree of honesty with my coach and the willingness to share what's really happening in my life and with my goals will significantly impact the effectiveness of the coaching.

I am committing to be a part of this coaching for 22 sessions over approximately 11 months, with the understanding that if I find I cannot complete the course, I will discuss this with my coach before discontinuing.

Mutual Responsibilities:

We commit to work together with respect, discretion and honesty. If the coaching relationship is not effective or if issues arise between us, we commit to be proactive in talking about this and getting the help we need moving forward.

The freedom to share the realities of life and growth comes from the safety of mutual trust. We commit to be trustworthy partners in this relationship. There are some situations that go beyond the bounds of a normal coaching relationship and require the help of others. If third-party mediation or consultation is needed, it will be sought.

Practical Expectations:

1. Meeting Frequency: We'll meet roughly every 2 weeks, for 60 min each session by telephone.
2. Commitment: We'll work together for 22 sessions, which may be extended with mutual agreement.
3. Review: We'll take time every 4-5 sessions to review how the coaching relationship is going and make any needed adjustments.
4. Schedule: We will respect each other's schedules. If one of us can't make a meeting or meet expectations, that one will take the initiative to let the other know and reschedule with as much notice as possible (at least 24 hours).

Signature of Client

Date

Signature of Coach

Date

Myers-Briggs Type Indicator: Questionnaire and Validation Exercise

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is a questionnaire designed to identify personality preferences and provide descriptive profiles of personality types. It has been validated in more cultures than any other similar tool and is widely used in the fields of business, education, and coaching. Completing this exercise can be personally enlightening and increase the effectiveness of the coaching process. You may complete the exercise before our first session or, if you have questions, we can discuss it first when we meet. Please review the following and follow relevant instructions.

Accessing MBTI Info and an Online Questionnaire

To discover your MBTI type profile, do the following:

- Go online to: www.humanmetrics.com and complete the free MBTI-like assessment. You can take this MBTI-like assessment without registering or purchasing anything.
- After completing the questionnaire, click on “Score it”. You will be taken to a page with your scores, giving the strength of your preference, and your four letter MBTI descriptor.
- If you click on “**ISTJ** (or whatever their letter combo is) type description by D. Keirsey”, you will be taken to the Keirsey.com site for a full description of your profile.
- Email that to me, if you please.
- You can also find other useful information on the Keirsey website including how your profile deals with stress, “best job fit”; relationships, etc. These are excellent resources!

Sample SERMON EVALUATION FORM

I am undertaking a one year program to improve my preaching. To be successful, I need your honest and thoughtful feedback on my communication skills.

This evaluation should take no more than 10 minutes to complete. Please answer ALL questions based upon today's sermon ONLY. This evaluation is intended to be anonymous so *please do not place your name anywhere on this form.*

Though I don't want your name, some basic demographic information will be helpful. Please answer the following by placing a check mark in the blanks.

1. Which Sunday service did you attend? _____ 8:00 _____ 10:30
2. ____ Male ____ Female
3. What is your age? ____ Under 18 ____ 18-25 ____ 26-40 ____ 41-60 ____ Over 60

WHAT DID YOU HEAR AND SEE?

Please indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement with the statements below.

CONTENT:

1. The preacher effectively communicated a single, main idea.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree

2. The introduction grabbed my attention.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree

3. The arrangement of the sermon was easy to follow.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree

4. The plain meaning of the Scripture was made clear.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree

5. The preacher effectively illustrated the main idea of the text.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree

6. The preacher believed what he was saying and was passionate about it.

7. The preacher's choice of words was clear, personal and direct.

8. The preacher seemed to make eye contact across the entire congregation.

9. The preacher's gestures and facial expressions were appropriate.

WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER? Briefly answer the following questions.

14. What was the main action the sermon urged you to take?

16. What would make this sermon stronger?

17. Was there anything distracting about the preacher's presentation?

18. Any other comments you would like to make?

S.M.A.R.T. Goal Guide

Christian faith is future-oriented. In the parable of the good steward, Jesus taught that he delights in a servant willing to take risks and use what God has invested in us for the future. God's vision is our lives made new, the world made new. He seeks us as personal participants in making that a reality, "on earth as it is in heaven."

Our Lord waits for us to choose because God really has given us stewardship of our lives. Setting a goal is making a choice to step out into the new world God is making. When we commit to a path, not only are our own internal resources brought to bear, but the faith involved in setting the goal draws upon God's power as well.

Turning dreams into goals:

Dreams – A dream is a visionary creation of the imagination, an unrefined hope or wish for the future.

Goals – A goal is a specific end that we are committed to attaining in the future in a planned and intentional way.

Articulating a goal is essential to turning a dream into reality. The best goals are S.M.A.R.T. goals. That acronym is a helpful format for making the goal: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-specific to refine your goal statement.

Specific: A goal is specific when you can describe it in concrete terms.

Example: "I want to raise support" is not a specific goal—how much is enough support? "I want to raise the support amount that meets my organization's guidelines," or "I want to raise enough to cover both my bills and to put \$2000 in my retirement fund annually".

Measurable: You need to know when you've accomplished your goal.

Example: "I want our team to function better" is not a measurable goal—how do I know when the team is "better"? "I want to lead my team in setting 3 long-term goals and meeting them by the end of the year" is a measurable goal.

Attainable: Is your goal realistic given your resources and circumstances?

Example: "Our team will take a two week long working retreat to Tahiti" is tempting, but probably unattainable if your ministry is struggling with day to day finances for operations!

Relevant: is the goal consistent with your values and what's important to you?

Example: "I want to raise funds and personnel to build two additional orphanages by 2011" is a relevant goal for someone whose mission statement is ministry to orphans.

Time-specific: dreams can be non-specific, but goals involve timelines.

Example: “I want to start a discipleship program in our region” is worthy but not time specific.
“I will establish a discipleship program in my region within 9 months” has a timeline.

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VITA

Thomas W. Simmons IV was born on September 2, 1967 in Denver Colorado, and grew up in the Virginia suburbs of Washington, D.C. He was raised in a nominally Christian home, in the orbit of the Episcopal Church, but in his early teen years he broke that orbit for hedonism and atheism. When he reached college, however, he discovered credible Christian community, which led to his conversion to Jesus in the summer of 1986. Soon he sought to communicate his new faith to his friends. Graduating with a B.A. in History in 1989 from James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia, Tom went to Westminster Theological Seminary to study the Christian faith and improve his ability to share it with others. After graduating in 1993 with an M.Div., Tom's sought God's calling in the U.S. Army National Guard (1994-1997) and on Capitol Hill (1994-1996). God's call finally became clear, however, with the chance to preach regularly in an Episcopal congregation in 1996. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1998, and has served since 2002 as Rector of St. Peter's Church in Purcellville, Virginia. In that setting, Tom has experienced the preaching challenges described in chapter one, which led to the preaching track of the D.Min. program at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary 2010-2017. This program completely transformed how he prepares sermons, with noticeable improvements in the pulpit. Having experienced that transformation, Tom then sought out ways to share it with others. Hence, the idea for his thesis project. Upon anticipated graduation in May 2017, he hopes to continue offering his services as a "sermon coach," and gathering others who would like to join him in helping preachers improve, perhaps working in partnership with Gordon-Conwell and other seminaries.